

F O R T Y T W O

S E R M O N S

O N T H E

Most Important Concerns

O F A

C H R I S T I A N L I F E .

By the late. Rev. *ELISHA SMITH*, M.A.
Vicar of *Tidd St. Giles* in the *Isle of Ely*,
and *Castle-Rising* in *Norfolk*; Author of
The Cure of Deism.

The F I R S T V O L U M E .

On Divers Interesting Subjects, Doctrinal and
Practical.

L O N D O N :

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13 y 2

FOR Y T W O
SERMONS



72-1012



T O T H E

Right Reverend FATHER in GOD

E D M U N D

Lord Bishop of L O N D O N.

M Y L O R D,



OUR Lordship's known
Care for preserving the Or-
thodox Apostolical Faith, and
the Life of true Religion in
a pure and exact Morality; the Means
You have taken to this End in Your
excellent *Pastoral Letters*, and in all
the other Instances of Your Superin-
tendency over this populous Diocese;
These, my Lord, sufficiently point
You out for a Patron to any Writings
upon the same Christian Plan, and we
have Reason to think would have de-
termined

DEDICATION.

terminated the Author of the following Sermons, had he lived to give them to the Publick himself.

As the Duty incumbent on an Editor of Posthumous Works, is to do all possible Justice to the Memory of their Author, by complying with every Thing that is either known or imagined to have been Part of his own Design, presume to hope Your Lordship's Excuse for this Address, upon the Motives I have recited. Give me leave, my Lord, to add my own Veneration for Your great Abilities and eminent Office, as another Reason for subscribing myself,

Your Lordship's

Most Obedient,

Most Humble Servant.



PREFACE.

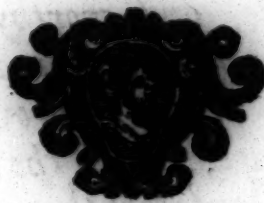
THE following Sermons are selected from a much greater Number, composed by the late pious and laborious Author. Those in the first Volume he left transcribed fair from his original Manuscripts, and corrected with his own Hand, which makes it more than probable that he had himself designed them for the Press. However, as we can advance nothing certain on this Head, we are obliged to acknowledge, that the Motive of this Publication was not so much what the Author might design, as the Good we imagined the Publick might receive from these Truly-Christian Compositions.

The second Volume is Part of a Series, which seems to have been once complete, for all the Sundays and Festivals of the Year, upon a Plan highly commendable, and worthy of Imitation: For what can be more so, than an Attempt always to make the utmost Improvement of those Portions of Scripture, which the Church has at that Time pointed out for the more immediate Object of our Meditation? The judicious Reader will perceive, that we have chosen that Part of the Course, which affords the most fruitful and affecting Subjects to a sincere Christian; the History of the Sufferings, Death, Resurrection, Glorification, and Intercession of his dear Redeemer.

P R E F A C E.

deemer. There is only a Chasm of one Sermon, which we could no where find.

Notwithstanding the Multiplicity of Books has been a long and grievous Complaint, we believe those of a serious and spiritual Nature have not much contributed to it. It is neither our Business nor Inclination to censure what others have done in Divinity; but we must be excused for observing that there is something more aimed at in the Works of this Writer, than a florid Purity of Stile, or a Christianity brought down to the Level of Pagan Morality. If there were more Productions of his Reverend Brethren in the same Strain with The Cure of Deism, and These Discourses, the Church of England would hardly be loaded with so much Calumny as she has lately been, nor would there be any Shadow of Pretence for separating from her, in that tumultuous and unprecedented Manner which we daily behold.



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ON THE
Most Important Concerns
OF A
CHRISTIAN LIFE.

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S E R M O N

The First.

The Righteous Man and the Good Man characterised and compared.

R O M. v. 7.

Scarcely for a righteous Man will one die : yet peradventure for a good Man some would even dare to die.

TH E *Righteous* being here put in Contradistinction to the *Good Man*, requires a Limitation, and bespeaks a Character distinct from that of the good Man, by whom, in this Place, is intended a beneficent, charitable, obliging Person : The Original *ἀγαθός* *, with several of its Compounds †, carries this Meaning in several other Places of Scripture.

But who so prodigal of Life, as peradventure to offer it up for the very best, most consummate Person that ever lived? We read, indeed, St. John's Exhortation ||, that we ought to *lay down our Lives for the Brethren*. But this seems to respect his own, and other primitive Confessors Fate ; that in Confirmation of their Doctrine, and for the sake of gaining others over to Eternal Life, they ought to be willing to lay down their Temporary one ; glad

* Matth. xx. 15. Romans xii. 21.

† Mark iii. 4. 1 Tim. vi. 18.

|| 1 John iii. 16.

of Martyrdom in so good a Cause. We read also of *Moses's*, * praying to be *blotted out of the Book of the Living*, i. e. that he might even share in the Destruction; weary of his Life, and Authority over the Children of *Israel*, if it would not please the Almighty to forgive them that rash consuming Sin, of making the first Golden Calf: But this was a seasonable devoting his Life and all his Interest with God to the publick Good. It was also very generous in *Jonas*, to sacrifice his Life, to appease the Storm, and redeem the Lives of those he was embarked with: A good Type of our Saviour's Love in dying, and rising again for us! And the Sacrifice *Sampson* totally made of his, was from the same Motive. *St. Clement*, in his famous Epistle to the *Corinthians*, assures us of many of his Contemporaries, who delivered themselves into Bonds of Slavery, that they might restore others to their Liberty; many who hired out themselves Servants unto others, that by their Wages they might feed and sustain them that wanted. Our Apostle also, ch. ix. ver. 3. of this Epistle, could have *wished himself accursed from Christ for his Brethren, the Jews Sake*; if such a Wish, and such a Figure of his Love, would compass their Conversion. And of the *Galatian* Converts he bears Witness, † that they would, by Way of Service, *have plucked out their Eyes and given him*, had he required it.

Still, where is he to be met with, who will venture so far, as to part with his Life for the dearest Friend, or kindest Benefactor that ever was heard of? A famous Pair of Friends are said to have personated, and strove to undergo Death for each other: But all the Truth of that may be no more than poetical Imagery. Friendship, notwithstanding it is so very dear and engaging, supposes,

* Exod. xxxii. 31. † Gal. iv. 15.

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and is founded on Life: And if the Rule directs *loving another as ourselves*, he only transgresses it, who offers up his Life, for that is loving better. It was the friendly *Mæcenæ's* Observation *, "that we are to serve a Friend in every Thing consistent with Friendship; but Death is incompatible, is itself the Death of all terrene Friendships." With what Interpretation then receive we the present Scripture? — Suppose, if you please, some one really sacrificing his Life, and all for a good Man: The Question instantly recurs, Whether he would not best deserve that Title himself? Or, what good Man would suffer another to undergo it, without a like, which in this Case is an impossible, Return? Is Excess commendable in nothing so much as in the Case of Gratitude? Or Ingratitude, is that so detestable, that we ought to suffer any Thing, even Death itself, rather than incur it? Some Return, without doubt, we ought to make; nay, if in our Power, a compleat Requital: But this is more than a Requital.

While we are thus musing on the Words, does not this apposite Meaning plainly present itself to our Edification? That the diffusively good, the generously kind, the charitable, beneficent Man, is the most valuable Person in the World; far beyond the much-esteemed honest, just Man. And if any Thing besides the Christian Faith, and the publick Good, deserves to excite, or is able to justify the Oblation of my Life, it would be the Rescue and Preservation of that endeared Person, beneficent in general to all, to me in particular most obliging: It would be heroick to safe-guard the precious Life of that most useful Benefactor to Mankind, at the Hazard of my own. *Seneca* has a noble

* *Omnia pro amico, dummodo vivamus: mors ultima linea rerum.*

Resolution : “ * I will help a dying Man if I
 “ can, but I will not die myself for him ; unless
 “ by my Death I can save a great Person, or be-
 “ come the Price of a great Thing.”

Should we with some read the Words with an Interrogation, they will have the same Intendment, and mightily besides enhance the Apostle's Argument, proceeding manifestly here in a Climax and Gradation. Take then the Interrogation, and read with a Question : They admirably magnify the superlative Kindness and Love of our Saviour, as coming into this sinful World, as a Lamb among Wolves, to die for Men, who were neither righteous nor good : For who will die for a *righteous* Man ? Nay, who find in his Heart to die so much as for a *good* Man ? Yet *Jesus Christ* actually died a Death of Pain, and Shame, for us, who were neither : So it follows in the next Verse : *But God commended his Love to us, (a prodigious Commendation it is !)* in that while we were yet Sinners, Christ died for us.

Either Way, we have, you see, in this Passage a distinguishing Preference designedly given to Charity above Justice : It being a common Thing with the Spirit of God and Goodness in other holy Scriptures, to single out this Virtue, and set this Christian Excellence foremost of all the rest, for the Imitation of Christians. But no where, I think, is the Esteem and Affection we ought to bear so remarkably endeared to a living Man, as in this instant Scripture.

And I hope you are of Opinion, that it affords me a fair Occasion of,

I. Endeavouring to represent the Character of the *Righteous*, and of the *Good Man*, singly and apart.

* Succurram perituro, sed ut ipse non peream, nisi si futurus ero magni hominis, aut magnæ rei, merces.

II. Of

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- II. Of drawing the Comparifon between them, that we may better perceive how much the Good Man deserves the Preference.
- III. Of confidering what Duty and Gratitude is due to this Good Man, couched under the Expref- fion of, Daring to die for him.

First, My first Endeavour is to represent the Character of the *Righteous* and of the *Good Man* fingly and apart.

As to the righteous Man, my Text does not oblige me to fpeak of him in the whole Latitude of the Word ; but reftrains me to confider him only in the Duties and Offices that relate to his Neighbour, Mankind. — He is one then who exactly practices common Juftice and moral Honesty ; juft and true in all his Dealings ; hurts no Body's Perfon, Name, or Circumftances, by Word or Deed ; pays all their juft Dues claimable by any Law, or Custom of the Country where he fojourns : Whatever Things are honeft, true, juft, he tranfacts fairly and impartially, whether towards Superiors, Equals, or Inferiors : Tribute to whom Tribute ; Custom to whom Custom ; Fear to whom Fear ; Honour to whom Honour. He fcorns to defraud or over-reach the fimpleft though he could do it fafe of a Discovery ; being honeft out of Confcience, not merely for a Name. Were there no municipal Laws, he would be full as juft as he is ; governing himfelf by that univerfal Reason and Equity, which is the moral Virtue of all written Laws. Were there any Flaws in making, or Quirks in executing fuch Laws, he would ftill take no Advantage thereof.

He maketh not fluctuating Opinion the Rate of eternal Good and Evil. Nor the Combinations of the Self-defigning, or the Zeal-deceiving or deceived (fo often contradictory to one another) to be the abfolute Meafure and true Scale of Honesty ; but rather its *Mifnomer*, and a defigning Par-

tiality among Men. Where and when he is obliged to speak, he speaks the plain unequivocating Truth, rather than flatter any, or occasion one to be deceived; not ashamed of God's Testimonies even before Kings. With the *Psalmist*, * he worketh Righteousness, and speaketh the Truth from his Heart; punctually keeps his Word and Promise, though to his own Hurt. He changes not. So very Praise-worthy is he in the common Esteem, that we seem to comprise all Worth, when we call a Person a *right honest Man*.

For indeed this is a Virtue previously fundamental of all the social Virtues, and ever will be the most indispensable in Society. It is plain, Charity, and all obliging Goodness, can have no other Basis as Virtues among Men, distinguished in their Properties; seeing nothing can be charitable to any one, but what is first just to all. When Mankind formed themselves into Societies, and separate Properties, where could there have been found any Enjoyment of Right or Property, without a mutual Confidence of not invading or disturbing one the other? When first that encroaching unfociable Self-interest induced some to be false, others unjust, then arose written Laws, as Barriers and Boundaries, to secure every one their own, and punish the violent or crafty Intruder into other People's. So that from the Abundance of devised Methods for neglecting this Virtue, sprang all the voluminous Laws throughout the World, which, one way or other, concern little else but *Meum* and *Tuum*. With what abiding Firmness subsist all Leagues and Alliances, Intercourse and Commerce between Nation and Nation, when they subsist on this Virtue of good Faith! Yet this necessary Virtue must give Place to Charity, as we shall see by and by.

* *Psalm. xv.*

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There is an odd Notion of Honesty suck'd in, as I may say, among a sort of Men, which I do not know whether I had best intimate or not; unless the bare Hinting may be sufficient to expose the Injustice of clipping and abusing so grave and solemn a Word. I mean the Appellation of *Honest Fellow*; one that minds his Bottle, and troubles himself little with other Things. Is it because he pays his Reckoning generously, constantly keeps Appointments, exactly gives and takes the same Measure in the Glass, calling it with great Satisfaction, the doing you Justice; whilst he would have you, like himself, nicely just at those Oblations to all the circling Healths, though to the impairing of his own? Thus by a constant Course of jovial Honesty, it is true, commonly true, he is robbing his Family of Sustenance, himself of Innocence, and the Publick of his Service.

To the avoiding this, with some Folks reputable, tho' certainly unjust, and actually indictable Honesty, it is enough to have named it to rational Hearers.—From him, no desirable Sight! if we turn our Eyes *secondly* to the good, the kind, and beneficent Man; Him we have the inspired Writings describing in charming Representations. With the *Psalmist*, * *He is very merciful, and his Seed is blessed*; he sheweth Favour, and guides his Affairs of that Nature with Discretion; *takes not up a Reproach against his Neighbour, nor willingly slanders him*. His lovely Dispositions are set forth by St. Paul in the most engaging Characteristicks: *As suffering long, and being kind; vaunting not himself; envying not; not being puffed up; not behaving himself unseemly; seeking not his own; not easily provoked; thinking no Evil; rejoicing not in Iniquity, but rejoicing in Truth; bearing all Things; believing all*

* Psa. xxxvii. 26.

Things ; hoping all Things ; enduring all Things :*

—He is, in short, all Things excellent and lovely in the Eyes of Men. How can he be otherwise, who looks upon it to be his Duty, to lay out his Thoughts, his Time, his Means, in doing all the Good he can to all ? He therefore receives good Offices from others, as Favours ; does them himself, as Debts ; making the least of what he gives, and the most of what he receives. He will ask nothing of another that is inconvenient for him to grant ; but you oblige him most, good Man ! by asking, *i. e.* giving him an Opportunity of discharging his pleasant Duty. He would even be glad to prevent your Request, if he could know your Want. They who need, and they who receive his ready Benefits, seem to him not much inferior to Benefactors. He lends to some, hoping for nothing again ; and gives to other some, desiring no Return, but to be informed how he may do further Services. If he moderately labours after an Addition of Worldly Goods, it is as much for Others Sakes as his Own ; for the Advantage principally of extending his Beneficence farther ; of being more hospitable to Strangers ; more liberal to the Poor ; and more assisting to his Friends. Whatever therefore are his Possessions, he of all Men may be said to enjoy them, and enjoy them too without Envy, seeing all these in good Measure partake with him. When any apply to him for Service, he promises not so much as he performs ; being short of nothing but doing less than he threatens ; and performs with so frank and condescending an Air (if to an Inferior) as if he valued the Person as much as the Duty. If he receives from, and becomes obliged to Superiors, it is ever

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on Principles of Honour, and the After-merit of maintaining a perpetual Gratitude.

Whatever he himself gives or grants, he does it freely, and soon, and chearfully; not clogging the Benefit with hard Conditions, or seeming Unwillingness, or Repentance afterwards. When he cannot serve you himself, he presently engages some Friend or Acquaintance to accomplish your Desire. If no way in his Power to grant your Request, he then answers with such Concern and Courtesy, that you find yourself even obliged with the Manner of his Denial.

And, what crowns all with double Lustre, he says and does these Things without the least Affectation, in studied Concealment and Obscurity; not letting his Right Hand know what his Left is doing; not his rich next-door Neighbour on the one Hand, if on the other lives an indigent Family that subsists on private Charity; often relieving Wants, and the Shame of Begging, at the same Time, by Supplies from an unknown Hand. Within himself, whilst he enjoys the Conscience of these good Deeds, (which gives Sublimity to his Mind, and to his Bosom the greatest Rejoicing) he shuns Applause from Men, (for that is very often least acceptable where it is most deserved) but, by industriously shunning, merits it the more. Divine Humility! Great celestial Use of Reason wherever seen! which Men may justly admire; can never sufficiently commend; but Heaven will amply reward hereafter. While he is here on Earth, let us converse in the Company of this engaging Man, that you may be further delighted, and inspired to Imitation, with observing how the Benevolence of his Good Nature shews itself, in saying, and doing whatever he judges will entertain, by advantaging you most: For, as *St. Paul* requires,
* he

* he does not please himself, but his Neighbour to Edification. Upon serious Subjects, which he is not unmindful to introduce, he seasons his Discourse with Grace: Upon indifferent ones (for he complies with all innocent Humours and Fashions) he displays Chearfulness and Easiness, rather than any upbraiding Superiority of Knowledge: More intent upon hearing others, than to the Opportunity of speaking himself. To give every one the acceptable Opportunity of shewing themselves, is to him a delicate Satisfaction; for the same Apostle teaches him, † *not to look on his own Things, but the Things also of others.* He never disputes with a mere Design to contradict, but sometimes to instruct himself; always for Truth, never for Victory: Therefore manages without Heat or Passion; ingenuously retracts an Error, and owns himself convinced. The softest Words, with the soundest Arguments he knows of, are his Method with those who dissent from him in civil or religious Opinions. He seldom uses Raillery; knowing, when sharp, it is as hard to be borne by some as an open Injury. He never observes upon, nor derides the natural Blemishes of any; his Regard being solely to their moral voluntary ones, the only Deformities that are shameful. He envies none preferred before him in a Competition; and scorns every ungenerous Method to supplant his Rival, tho' provoked to it. He speaks the true Ill of no Man that deserves it, unless the greater Good of others necessitates it. In Matters of Ceremony he gives Place to all, who will take it; in Honour, *preferring others, and esteeming them better than himself,* as in Duty bound. When he gives Advice, as to the Young and Ignorant, he delights in Opportunities; but rarely to others, where he has not the proper Authority to add to

* Rom. xv. 2.

† Phil. ii. 4.

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it : But when ask'd, he does it in the best Season and Manner, and without Self-interest ; mutually asks it himself, and receives it thankfully : Hears of his own Faults with all the Calmness of Patience, but impatiently amends them. The Faults or Misfortunes of all he knows, or hears of, affect him with Concern, and their Prosperity with Rejoicing. Whoever has good Fortune, he makes it his own by Sympathy. And those that are in Prison, Sorrow, Need, Sickness, or any other Adversity, in Mind, Body, or Estate, he, by himself or others, visits with Aids for bettering their Condition.

In Friendship, he is most affectionately faithful, without too many Professions of his being so : He goes to feast with his Friend, (where every Thing is a Feast) but makes much more haste to his Misfortunes ; *his Feet* being, by the Direction of the *Psalmist*, *swifter to do, than receive Good*.

In his Family, you see him indulgent to, and not the less provident for the principal, and every other Interest of his loving Kindred ; treating his Servants, as knowing he himself has equally a Master also in Heaven ; and they reciprocally obey him chearfully, hardly desiring greater Liberty, being as faithful to his Interest as their own. His Mercy and Tenderness extends even to brute Beasts, and they fare the better for it.

Consider him lastly serving his Country, and you will be pleased in seeing how much he foregoes his own Ease and Quiet, whenever or wherever call'd to its Service. A steady incorruptible Zeal for that so much inspires his Conduct, that no Hazard, no Burthen, no Expence is declined for its Sake. If employed in the higher Spheres of Trust, he discharges it with the greatest Diligence and Disinterestedness : In every Thing, upon all Emergencies, it is a Matter of Conscience to him, to seek his own Interest

Interest only in Subordination to that of the Publick ; short of which, he knows, he cannot claim the Name of Honest ; but in fulfilling that Character, by observing the true Measure of Publick Spiritedness, how much does he, with the worthy Founders of great Families in all Ages, deserve universal Applause ? As long as he continues in such precarious Stations, he therefore loses no Opportunity of doing all the Good he can ; because he neither courted nor accepted the Power for any other End, comparably to that of indulging himself in the glorious divine Pleasures of promoting the good of others. He is so truly devoted to the publick Welfare in every Stage and Station of Life, as to follow the only Principles of that in our present happy Establishment, and neither lead, nor be led by any Party, or Person, any further ; assisting all he can, but never going retrograde to its Prosperity, envying none the Honour of being the Instruments of it. If he is ordained to any holy Function, he takes care to brighten the Faithfulness of teaching the Truth as it is in *Jesus*, and, as it belongs to such a Steward of the great Exemplar, with an exemplary Goodness. His exceeding Love to Souls recommends his Master's Precepts the better, and the Charms of his own conformable Conversation give Life and Force to his Discourses beyond any Language. If the Opinion of his Probity gives Weight to his Words, what diffusive Persuasion follows captive from the Knowledge of his diffusive Charity ! His Moderation and Mercy, his Peaceableness and Patience, his general Kindness to Mankind, his great Affection to his Country's Good, and his carrying on the true Intention of the Bible for promoting that, are so far from giving Offence in any Thing, whereby the Ministry may be blamed, that it occasions it to be esteemed as a most useful Function : Because he
exerts

The righteous and the good Man compared. 13.

exerts the same upon any Crisis of Danger to the Protestant Religion or *British* Liberties, for recovering his Fellow Subjects to an Understanding of their own Happiness, under the Blessing of our present Settlement: Teaching them the ever-constant Religion of living in peaceable Submission to Governors; of *fearing God, honouring the King, and loving one another.*

Thus have we observed the beneficial and engaging Conduct of this emphatically good Man in the Text, in every Station of Life; and observing, must needs love him; and Love will dispose (if any Thing can) to suffer even Death for his Sake. And we shall be the more confirmed in this Disposition, especially of undergoing it rather for him than the strictly righteous Man, when we have compared them a little together; which was my second Endeavour, *viz.*

II. To draw the Comparison between them, that we may the better perceive how much the good Man deserves the Preference. Comparing Excellencies is the briefest Way of distinguishing them.

If we take our Rise at the Fountain-Head of these Virtues, and consider them in the Original, whence they derive, I mean the Deity itself, there Mercy and Goodness have the Pre-eminence over all the rest. *It rejoiceth against Judgment,* to the enlarging the Almighty's distributive, and to the restraining his vindictive Justice. *In the Midst of Judgment he remembers Mercy.* Without this how undesirable would all his other Attributes be? His Wisdom would astonish and confound us, by overreaching ours; his Power and Justice affright us in our Guilt; his Holiness only upbraid and disgust us with our own Vileness and Unworthiness, if infinite Goodness and Compassion did not step in to sweeten and conciliate them all unto us,
by

by freely proffering Grace and Pardon upon easy Conditions, even the Imitation of that same Goodness and Mercy, that so imitating, *Homo Homini Deus sit*; that we endeavour to be perfect in that, as he is perfect; that we imitate, as far as our Imperfections will admit, that superabundant Mercy of his, “ which is, (as one well expresses it) always ready for those who desire it, always finds out those who seek it, often stands in the Way of those who would avoid it, and overtakes them that fly from it.” It is this which renders the Godhead so amiable, so adorable; this which charms us into a Fear of his Displeasure, and Obedience to his Laws; this which leads, or should lead all Men to Repentance, and opens their Mouths wide in his Praise. In short, his Goodness renders him a God to Mankind, and to us consigns that very Name; it is that which constitutes him our Father a Redemer, our Preserver and Rewarder. Besides, Love and Charity are not only the Way and Means, but the remaining Habit and Disposition of the Soul for the Entertainments of future Bliss. Justice, Hope, Faith, and all other Virtues, have their Use solely here, and leave us at the Grave; only Charity goes along with us, and continues for ever, as it begins our Heaven here. For it is not our mere honest Dealings that gives a Title or Assurance now, seeing we know only that we have passed from Death to Life by our Love to our Brethren;* nor gives it Possession hereafter, at the great Audit of Accounts; but feeding the Hungry, clothing the Naked, visiting the Sick and Imprisoned, doing all the Good we can in our Generation, that being the Christian Business Christians are to think themselves placed in Society to accomplish. For that glorious Intent our Saviour

* 1 John iii. 14.

The righteous and the good Man compared. 15

himself condescended to come into this World; and the nearest Representative he has left behind on Earth, is the Person that does most Good to the Souls and Bodies of Men. We his Followers are obliged to imitate his Business of doing Good in this World, and not to take up with the barren Virtue of doing no Harm to the World. That, though the great Branch of Justice, is rather to be innocent than virtuous; but to oblige and benefit all in our Power, is the Glory and Compendium of all Virtues, the Topick of all Praise, the summary Lesson of *Moses* and the Prophets, of *Christ* and the Apostles: For he that loves his Neighbour, fulfils the whole Law.

The just Man is described, *rigidi servator honesti*, one that governs himself by a Set of inflexible Rules, without due Regard to Circumstances and the Equity of Things: And so becomes in the great Preacher's Sense, *Righteous over much*, i. e. often injurious, without the personal Chancery of Goodness and Candour, ready to qualify and make Allowances.

Wit, and Learning, and Riches, and Power, and high Descent, and Beauty, and Valour, destitute of Goodness, become undesirable Things: Forasmuch as not one of them ever secures to the Owners the inward Esteem of others, where there is not some competent Degree of Goodness dispensing each of them. But a great deal of this last, even with very little of those Advantages, is able to win the Heart with an Opinion of Worthiness, and with a secret Reverence: So that what is truly Praise-worthy in any of the former, must be constantly borrowed from this. Hence the strictly just Governor, or Magistrate, has indeed our Fear, whilst the Good and Clement commands our Love, which commands all the Obedience of a Man. The Austerity of the former keeps you at an awful Distance;

tance ; the sweet Courtesy, and endearing Affability of the latter, irresistibly makes Way into the Opinions and Affections of those who are so happy to address him: And an Authority so founded the more easily rules others with their own Consent, at the same Time that it loses nothing of its proper Respect and Homage. But the Wicked in Place, *i. e.* they who neglect or pervert the publick Ends of their Station, have nothing but our outward Respect for a Season ; and that is rather paid to their Post than their Person.

The just Magistrate chastises with Severity ; the Good executes Punishment with a benevolent Intent, for reclaiming the Offender, if possible, as well as for a Terror to others. One believes none criminal but upon evident Guilt ; the other would always spare Criminals, if the publick Safety would permit.

Common Justice and Judicatories redress the Injuries of those who can help themselves by a Course of Law ; Goodness the Wants and Wrongs of those that can't.

The righteous Man gives every one what is *their* rightful Due ; the charitable Man out-does him, he gives more, in giving what is *his own* moreover ; and when he has conferred one Kindness, does not wait for a Return, still going on to bestow a second and third, never weary of well-doing. The one barters for Kindness, and puts his Benefits out to Use, thinking one good Turn deserves another ; the other makes so much Haste to return an Obligation, as if he scorned to be beholden. The Just (because he gives all their Dues) dispraises those freely who deserve it. The good Man conceals the Ill he knows, and finds some pretty Excuse for the Faults the other divulges. One expects Praise, as a Tribute to his Merit : The other declines nothing so much, expecting his *Euge* and Applause from other Hands.

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The righteous and the good Man compared. 17

The first keeps his Promise punctually ; the second is commonly better : So that keeps Secrets as well, but this does not care to hear them.

The austere upright Man is suspicious of his Dependants, on slight Appearances ; and thereby gives them the first determining Reason of being ill in good Earnest ; whilst the candid good Man takes a better Way to prevent it, by hoping the best, even what he has little Reason to believe : He can forgive the Injuries of an Enemy, therefore easily passes over the Mistakes of a Friend. This too makes the first Step, and goes more than half Way towards a Reconciliation upon any Misunderstanding : That Man stands upon Punctilio's, waiting for Concessions and Acknowledgments of Faults : To one few Faults are remissible ; to the other all Sorts. If one's Righteousness produces him few Adversaries ; the other's is the more prevalent Way of overcoming Evil, and converting every single Enemy into a Friend.

In a Word, this never-enough to be commended Virtue, as it shines bright in the Light of Christianity, has not only a transcending Advantage and Pre-eminence over Justice, and Heathen Ethicks, but over all evangelical Gifts and Graces. If Justice is human, nothing is more divine than Love ; It is comprehensively every Thing most excellent and amiable in Man : It perfects his Nature, renders him most like the Deity, and is that which shines brightest there ; it hides the Multitude of Sins, and gives Approbation at the last Day ; nay, is the very Disposition and Beginning of his future Happiness.

And in this Life, the good Man's compassionate diffusive Influences to the Needy and Miserable ; his benign, meek, forgiving Temper to the Injurious, never fail to conciliate universal Good-will, and make him beloved as a general Good, a public

lick Blessing ; as one that lives to the Welfare of his Country, the Glory of God, and the Honour of Christianity. When he appears Abroad, behold him respected with the Esteem of all, with the Prayers and best Wishes of every Body. Tenders of hearty Service wait his Occasions, and glad are they who have their Gratitude first accepted. When he sickens, Sadness overspreads many Faces, whilst Fervour wings their Prayers for his Recovery. When he dies, the Misfortune it almost generally condoled, and not a few strain their Eloquence upon his Character, and the publick Loss, wishing nothing more than that they could record to all Ages the Excellencies of this *Manacitus*.

And who doubts (if that could have rescued him) but some would have been found more particularly obliged to him, who would even dared to have died for him ? Which should bring on the

III. Branch, What Duty and Gratitude is due to this good Man, couched under the Expression of daring to die for him. But I have already exceeded your Patience. That may be all summed up in saying, That it is our truest Duty to imitate him closely ; our best Gratitude to be as like him as we can.

May every one here present, go, and do likewise.



S E R M O N

The Second.

Sins of Infirmary stated and distinguished; their Excusableness and Consistence with the Favour of God.

The first Sermon on P S A L. xix. 12, 13.

Who can understand his Errors? Cleanse thou me from secret Faults.

Keep thy Servant also from presumptuous Sins: Let them not have the Dominion over me; then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great Transgression.

TH E Royal Psalmist, who had himself been a very presumptuous Offender, but afterwards more illustrious for his Repentance than his Dignity and State, from the first to the seventh Verse of this excellent Psalm, finely displays, and, by displaying, argues so as to make us hear, and see the Being, the Power, and the Wisdom of God, from the admirable Works of Creation; which speak so intelligibly for themselves before all the World. The Language was so divine and plain, that tho' there was no Speech, nor Language, nor Voice heard, yet their Words went out to the End of the World,

declaring to, and convincing all its Inhabitants of the Glory of God, by the Heavens, and the Firmament shewing his handy Works: And these great and glorious handy Works are proclaimed far and near, as plainly as if they had one thousand Tongues.

For all the Languages of all the Nations upon Earth, that speak at all of these Things, are united to and accord with this Grammar of Divine Works, composed by God himself from the Beginning, for our universal Instruction. From the seventh Verse to my Text, he goes on to set forth the Perfection of the divine Law (as it was in his Time) and the blessed advantageous Light of it to our Paths: That it as clearly revealed the Will of God, what our Duty is, as the other did his Existence: That it gave Warning to all his Servants against Evil-doing, and Rewards for their doing well. Both these he purposely mentions as an Aggravation of the presumptuous Sins he had formerly committed; and here recollecting them with deep Sorrow, offers up the Words of the Text in Prayer to be delivered from the like for the future. Sins of Presumption, the Law of God and his Conscience told him, were of such an heinous Nature as to admit of no Excuse, whilst there were other lesser Sins and secret Faults, cleaving even to the conscientious Performance of Duty, and rendering it imperfect: As Omissions, with respect to the doing that Good, which might have been done, or of some Circumstances of the Good that was done, which might have been better done; or Deviations with regard to some Things forbidden that ought to be left undone; and these so many, that they could not all be remembered or numbered, how oft Men offended in such Instances, that the best cannot live without Abundance of them. From the Imputation of these Faults in the Lump, (se-
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Sins of Infirmary stated and distinguished. 21

cret and unobserved tho' they are to the Offender, yet known every one to God,) this religious King prays to be cleansed.

Thus did this holy Penitent enter into the State of his Soul, and the Quality of its Offences, in relation to the Law that was given him to observe. And we Christians shall surely do well to examine our State and Conduct, with respect to the more perfect Law of Liberty which we have received: A Law, which sets us at Liberty, and at large from the intolerable Burthen of beggarly Services of the *Jewish* Yoke: A Law, which makes known to us moreover an Advocate with the Father, the Propitiation for our unrepented secret Sins, and also for those of Presumption that are repented of; which so much the better secures our Obedience, as it endears it to us from better Promises, from more potent Aids, and from the Tender of more explicit and helpful Means, for keeping under the Dominion of Sin, and setting up that manly Liberty of Mind, and Christian Principle of the Spirit, which ought to controul Sin and rule over the Flesh; in such an effectual Prevalency as to reduce it to Obedience, and maintain itself (tho' a molested, yet) the Governor and Director of the Christian Conversation.

The gracious Institution we enjoy requires not an absolute, a sinless, an unerring Obedience from us frail peccant Creatures; but, in its great Favour and Mercy, shews due Consideration and Compassion, and makes all proper Allowances to the Infirmities of our Nature; of which it therefore exacts no more than a sincere Obedience, entirely devoted to our Duty, and uprightly endeavouring the Performance to the utmost of our Power, in a diligent Application of all the prescribed Means. More than this we are sure cannot be expected, because more than this cannot be performed by us in

our lapsed Condition. And it is happy for us all, that it is moreover full of gracious Overtures and Invitations to Repentance for our wilful Sins, and of the frequentest and strongest Assurances of Pardon and Acceptance upon our nicely forsaking them; at the same Time that it is most justly severe in denouncing Wrath, Indignation, and Vengeance upon the impenitent, the wilful, the presumptuous Offender.—But as we are exceeding prone to flatter ourselves, by lessening and excusing our own Faults, and to judge those to be Sins of Infirmary, which are really wilful and damnable; and as we very often presume upon the Mercy and Pardon of God, even whilst we are offending of malicious Wickedness, it is of the very highest Importance to our common Safety and Welfare, to the Peace of our Conscience, and the Hopes we have in the Benefit of a common Saviour, for every one of us to be rightly apprised, what Failings in our Obedience are consistent with the Favour of God, and a well-grounded Expectation of Salvation; and what are utterly exclusive of them; of what Kind are they which are excusable by the Tenor of the Gospel, and of what Nature those, which incur the Pains and Punishments thereof. This very useful Undertaking is the Subject to be discoursed upon from these Words, whilst I state and distinguish,

- I. What are properly Sins of Infirmary.
- II. What are Sins of Presumption and Wilfulness, how very heinous in their Guilt, and how exceeding great their Danger.

Who can understand his Errors? Cleanse thou me from secret Faults.—Keep thy Servant also from presumptuous Sins: Let them not have Dominion over me; then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great Transgression.

I. What

I. What are properly Sins of Infirmary. They are all such Deviations from the Law of God, which have not the Assent and Consent of the Will, are not deliberately chosen by it, whether in Cases of Omission or Commission.—For the Will of Man is the Principal, the only Criminal in all our moral Irregularities; the Members of the Body, and the Passions of the Mind, are but Instruments to fulfil its Orders. It being that elective Power, which upon a View and Comparison of all the Proposals to human Action, whether of the greater Good in obeying God, or the Lesser, in following sensual Pleasure attended with conscious Guilt, makes its free Determination as it pleases; and such as that is, such is the subsequent Action, good or bad. In every Sin and every Virtue, the Will must be an essential Ingredient, and a deliberate Agent: If a Man therefore offends thro' some sudden Passion of Anger, Grief, Fear, thro' Surprise, Inadvertency, &c. which he was not aware to have guarded against, it is properly a Sin of Infirmary, and not a voluntary Transgression: Because here was not Time for the understanding and counselling Powers to interpose; but the Will was hurried, and ravished, as it were, into Consent, and what followed was Indiscretion, and improper Action, as being no proper human Choice. We accordingly find in Fact, that the best and holiest Fearers of God, and Doers of his Will, have been surprised into Indecencies by those Passions, which no doubt they were sorry for after the Commission: As *Moses* in a Passion threw down the Tables of the Law, and broke them; and *St. Paul*, thro' Inadvertency, spoke rash unbecoming Words of the High Priest; and many other Examples might be produced, of Persons in great Favour with God, were we to criticise their Blemishes, or did not this

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need any Proof. Temptation may attack a good Man so at unawares, before his Reason has Time to rally, or his Spirit to put on its repelling Armour, thro' Weariness, or short Intermiſſion of our Watch, that it may prevail. To this Purpose St. *Paul* takes it for granted, that a Brother may be overtaken with a Fault; and St. *James*, that he may err from the Truth: Yet neither one nor the other is for that Reason to be damned, forsaken, and despaired of. — The Circumstances of Age, the Diversity of Constitution, the incident Disorders from that Diversity, or Crosses in worldly Affairs, subject some Persons more than others to their particular Failings, which they cannot wholly get quite off, tho' they strive against them *. Many a passionate Word and foolish Thought they are guilty of, and would gladly be rid of; for what they do of that Kind, they would not, they approve not. -- There are also many unconquerable Frailties, and unavoidable Infirmities, which mingle with, and intrude themselves even into, our religious and most retired Employments; as wandering Thoughts in Prayer and Meditation. The Mind sets itself resolutely to think upon heavenly Things; yet, it knows not how, some impertinent Fancy, and vain Imagination, through the Subtilty of the Devil, darts in, and brings it down to Earth again, and takes it off its heavenly Engagement, till it recollects whither it is wandered: A strange unaccountable Coldness seizes sometimes the Devotions of the best Christians, and damps their Zeal and Ardour when they intended to be most fervent. So the first Motions and Inclinations to Sin, will be often struggling and instigating us to the Commitment of Evil; yet if these, and the other, are resisted what

* Vitiis nemo sine nascitur : Optimus ille est

Qui minimis urgetur.

Sins of Infirmary stated and distinguished. 25

we can, and not consented to, nor delighted in, they are to be enumerated among our Infirmities and Imperfections: For they spring up from the Frame and Constitution of our Nature; are the Blemishes of Original Pollution, and the remaining Totterings in the Offspring, which our first Parents contracted from their Fall. The terrestrial Composition of Flesh, which we derive from them, has strangely subjected us, since their presumptuous Offence, to Passion, to Forgetfulness, to Disinclination to Duty, and to various Imperfections, and innumerable Infirmities, that are not in our Power to help: They are sufficiently enough to increase the Humility of every good Man, but they ought not to molest any Man with Scruple or Vexation upon that Account. — If God should be extreme to mark what we do amiss in these involuntary Respects, no Flesh could be saved; for there is not a righteous Man upon Earth who is guiltless upon these Accounts. In many of these lesser Things we offend *all of us*: But God is so good as to overlook these Slips, and not impute them to his Servants. Both the Nature of God bespeaks, and the Covenant of Grace promises, Favour to them: Forasmuch as they are consistent with the sincere Performance of our Duty, with God's Approbation of our Carriage, and with a well-grounded Confidence of being rewarded by him hereafter. We must be striving after Perfection in Duty, and that Strife sufficiently engages God to pity unavoidable Defects in falling short: Nor is there any Arriving at the Perfection that is required of us defective Creatures as a Duty, without some Mixture, more or less, of Imperfection; that is a Part of, and inseparable from, our Nature, as long as we continue in earthly Tabernacles. In Truth, absolute Perfection is to be found

found in none but God, who is Light itself, and cannot be depainted: All Creatures are made fallible and peccable, and therefore no other than relative, comparative; Perfection, can be their Portion in all Stages of their Existence; such as is alloy'd and graduated with Defects and Imperfections of various Kinds, according to the Station and Relation they are placed in, and distinguished by; which serve, as Shades in Picture, to set them off the better, provided they are found with none but what appertain to their State and Nature. Human Perfection in this Life, is in a Manner half Imperfection, yet we may be perfect and entire, lacking nothing with respect to keeping the Commandments blameless, if we are not defective in Sincerity, and our best Endeavours in obeying them with all our Power, and wishing we could observe them better. For Man, that is born of a Woman, to be totally exempt from never wandering out of the Path of Duty, or not be liable to trip often, and fall sometimes through Weakness or Inadvertency, Surprise or Weariness, is more than human Imbecility can make good; it is to pretend to be more than Man: No mere Man on Earth ever attained unto it; not the great *St. Paul* himself, who, on the contrary, declares of himself, that he had not attained the Perfection he wished for, but was reaching himself out, and panting after it in heavenly Places. — During our Residence here in the Flesh, the Life and Dominion of the Spirit may flourish and maintain its Rule over every wilful Transgression urged by the Flesh, the World, or the Devil, and in the midst of those Frailties of Flesh and Blood, that are natural to, and unsurmountable by us. If we pray with the *Psalmist* in general, to be cleansed from these secret Faults, so inherent to our lapsed State, latent to our Wisdom, and absconded from our Precaution,

Sins of Infirmary stated and distinguished. 27

caution, we have nothing to apprehend from the Justice of God, tempered, as it is, with Gentleness and Equity, for making proper Allowances for helpless Deviations, and interpreting every Thing most favourably to Imperfections that are not of our own contracting. The perfect Righteousness of *Christ*, and the Merit of his Sacrifice, as they are All-sufficient to procure Pardon for the presumptuous Sins of the whole World, repented of and forsaken; are much more effectual for making good our unavoidable Defects, and continually atone, nay, prevent and anticipate the Father's Anger towards them. As there was in the *Mosaic* Law (as we read in the Fifteenth of *Numbers*) a constant Sacrifice for Sins of Ignorance in the Congregation, to be sure the real Sacrifice of our Redeemer will not fail to blot them all out in his Followers and Believers, upon the like Prayer of our *Psalmist* *. Many of the Fathers have thought Prayer itself, without Repentance, an Expiation sufficient for our involuntary Trespases, together with Forgiveness of all others that have trespassed against us; which is that Kind of Charity that is able to cover a Multitude of Sins. Thus the daily Use of the Lord's Prayer is adapted to the daily Expiation of those minute Sins. And with respect to such that are of a deeper Stain, our Church wisely addresses God, in Consideration that we are set in the midst of so many and great Dangers, that by reason of the Frailty of our Nature, we cannot always stand upright, he would please to vouchsafe Strength and Protection to us.— These very Frailties, Dangers, and Sollicitations, are even requisite in our State of Probation, as a Trial and Occasion of our Virtue. For where would be our Virtue, if there was no Inclination

* See *Kettlewell's Measures of Obedience*. Quarto, p. 628.

or Propensity to transgress? There could be no Mortification or Self-denial, if there were not some irregular Motions, selfish to the fleshly Part, to be denied and subdued. But therefore is the Virtue of the rational Mind pleasing to and rewardable by God, when it erects itself upon a Victory over those evil Inclinations, as being no proper human Choice, tho' conceiv'd in the Mind, yet restrain'd from finishing by actual Sin. There must be some *Test* for serving him as well as Opportunity of doing it; inward Concupiscence is therefore permitted to stir and strive against bounden Obedience; but so far from being displeasing to God, that it is the Crisis of our Virtue, and the very Article of Opportunity of pleasing him, and ingratiating ourselves into his Favour. We are not under the first Covenant of Works, which requires rigid Obedience in the Flesh as well as Spirit, and allowed no Tergeverſation in either; but, being under the Second Covenant of Grace, wherein our Sincerity, and the Mediator of that Covenant make our Duty perfect and compleat, we are degenerated perhaps into more Opportunities, as I may say, of serving God with what costs us something, and therefore of more Consideration to our Maker, than if we had continued still under the first. Under the first, Man's native Inclinations were all parallel to the moral Commandments of Righteousness and Holiness, without the least Disinclination or Degree of Variation from it; whereas now some Commandments being Cautions, and expreſs Directions to better Obedience, run counter to Man's altered Tendency and Inclination, (some to this Constitution, others to that): Thence arises the Occasion of getting the Mastery, and the Opportunity of acquitting ourselves like Men, not as Servants of the Flesh, but like the Servants of Liberty, of God, and

Sins of Infirmitie stated and distinguished. 29

and eternal Happiness ; by disobeying and by foregoing our Inclinations to Evil, and following the Commandment for our Good ; knowing that, if we forego the latter, and follow the former, it will be our Sin, and consequently to resist and do otherwise, must be our Virtue and Obedience.— We are not then carnal or criminal, for having an *Inclination* to that which is forbidden, no more than we are spiritual or holy for retaining abortive Desires, and making ineffectual Resolutions for godly Living. An habitual Following the Irregularities of the Flesh, as that leads, denominates us carnal ; as habitual Compliance with the Regularity of the Spirit and the Commandments as they direct, denotes us spiritual, righteous, and blameless. And in this Sense of connatural ingenite Corruption, it is true what *St. Paul* says in the 7th of the Epist. to the *Romans*, *that which we hate, and would not ; that we do ; and what we would, that we do not ; being not we that do it, but Sin that dwelleth in us : So Will is present with us, but how to perform we find not.* Though it is pretty evident, that the Apostle speaks not there of himself, but personates an unconverted Jew under the Law, in order to bring him out of Bondage, and put him under the easier Yoke of the Gospel ; but there is no Room here to make that out.—Mean time, it is for the Comfort and Consolation of all sincere Christians, who make a Conscience of their Duty, and maintain the Integrity of their Heart by a Conflict against Sin, to observe that many Omissions of Duty will be passed over, provided they are not wilful and chosen, upon any Opportunities that we have, or Circumstances that we are in : But where the Rule of our Obedience is open and known, and our own Conscience and the Spirit of God join together (as they ordinarily do join together) in putting us in Mind of it, then and there to omit

omit the Performance, is a deliberate presumptuous Crime against Conscience, and against the Spirit of God: But in case it proceeds from unavoidable Ignorance, Inconsiderateness, or Multiplicity of lawful Business, or present Indisposition of Body, or any other excusable Hindrance, God will also hold us excused, and will not severely reckon with us for them. If we should pretend to tell them, and sum them up under this Article, they would be more than we could count, and our Heart would fail us, if we had not Refuge in a merciful God, who considers that we are but Flesh.—How often do we incogitantly pretermitt fair Occasions that offer themselves for doing good, in relieving the Needy, comforting the Sick, or those that are in Trouble; of giving good Advice to the Ignorant, and those that are out of the Way; of friendly Correction towards our Brother, and not suffering Sin to lie upon him; of not rescuing and vindicating, when we knew the contrary, the Character of a Neighbour stabbed and assassinated in his Reputation, his chief Life in this World, by destroying Tongues; of not lifting up our Hearts to God when we awake in the Morning, and not recollecting at Night all the Transgressions of the foregoing Day; in putting up Ejaculations to him in sudden emergent Difficulty and Distress, or joyous Effects of Providence (for I suppose every one that pretends to be a Christian, omits not to say his Prayers Morning and Night, as well as frequent the Ordinances of the Church, as often as conveniently he can): These, I say, with innumerable more like unto them, will not be charged upon us, if they are casual and inconsiderate, and not persisted in out of Choice: But will fall under the Number of secret Faults, which our Prayers in general, the Grace of the Gospel, and the Sincerity of our Hearts and Endeavours, will prevent from being recorded against

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us.—So will many Lapses, and actually committed Offences and Irregularities, arising purely from sudden Passion, Surprise, and Inattention, be winked at, upon Condition that we faithfully strive against them, and no way indulge and habituate ourselves unto them, through an habitual Carelessness and Neglect of proper Caution.—For we must not be wanting to curb and restrain those daily Sins of Incurſion which we are liable to.—

And therefore I add farther, for the Encouragement of our Endeavours this Way, that tho' our Infirmities can never wholly be conquered by us, whilst we remain in this corruptible Body, which preſſeth down the Soul, and much hinders and diverts its rational Operations; yet we may in good Measure reduce their Number, and daily amend their Indecencies; and by getting the Maſtery over many of them, be found in the right Way of going on to Perfection, if we ſeriously intend it, and ſet vigorously about it. We might prevail over ſeveral more than we have attempted, if we uſed our beſt Endeavours, and ſummoned up all the Powers of our Mind to our Help, and made our Supplication to the Throne of Grace to preſerve us in due Watchfulneſs in all our Difficulties, to alleviate us with Hopes in all our Fears, and reſettle us in Recollection of Mind in every occaſional Diſtraction of Imagination and Spirit: So ſhall our Souls get the better in all Contentions, and chuſe the better Part in moſt Doubts, and ſo we ſhall eſcape from being always overborne with ſudden Temptations. Our High Prieſt above, who felt our Infirmities, yet without the leaſt Sin, will be ready to aſſiſt, relieve, and pity the *Frailties* of his Servants, which occaſion ſo many Sins againſt their Will and Deſign; he remembers whereof we are made; knows that our Ignorances are many; our Paſſions ſtrong; our Temptations deceitful;
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our Observation little ; our Inadvertencies innumerable ; our Resolutions weak ; and that the Obligations of our Duty are full of Variety, and the Instances very numerous ; and *upon these Considerations* will afford us all Grace and Strength, that is convenient for us, and effectual to make our Infirmities weaker and weaker. And when we go on in the Power of his Might to do what we can, we shall be accepted ; and wherein we fail, pitied and pardoned. We, in that Case, discharge all that was incumbent on us, and shall not miss of our Reward in the Regions of joyful Triumph, perfect Strength, and great Glory. Forasmuch as these Infirmities below are permitted to us for our Good, to augment our Recompence hereafter, to breathe our Virtue here, to stretch our Hopes to future Things, fix our continual Dependance upon God the firmer upon our Belief, and engage our Invocation of his Help the oftener. And what we cannot master thus fighting, and thus striving against, the rest will not in the least separate us from the Favour of our God, but perfectly well consist with our Growth in Grace, our daily Repentance and Endeavours after Perfection, and our well-grounded Hopes of his heavenly Kingdom.

But here these following Remarks are carefully to be observed by us all.

I. That Sins of Infirmary can have no Reference to the plain, legible, most important Rule of our Duty and Behaviour before God and Man, the Violation of these must necessarily be wilful and inexcusable. Helpless unavoidable Ignorance, where there are no Opportunities of Information, nor Capacity for Learning, will indeed meet with great Allowance at the final Day of Accounts from him, whose very Property and Characteristick in Scripture, is to have Compassion on the Ignorant, and those

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those that are out of the Way ; but if the Ignorance of his Followers is wilful and affected, purposely keeping out of the Way of the Knowledge of their Christian Covenant and its Obligations, in order not to conform to or comply with the same, this will be so far from excusing or abating, that it will be the very Aggravation and Enhancement of their Foolishness and Sin : Being in reality as presumptuous an Offence against the Kindness of Heaven, and as great a Contempt of the Knowledge of the Way of Salvation on their Parts, as can well be committed. These willingly Ignorant are accordingly very justly estimated in the Records of that Salvation, as wilful Sinners against God and their own Souls ; and therefore there is but little Hopes for such who persist and caress themselves in gross Ignorance of the grand saving Truths, and fundamental Precepts of our holy and easy Religion; easy in all Things absolutely necessary to be learned by any that can read, nay, by any that cannot read, if they will but ask Questions, and desire to be informed by their more knowing Friends and Neighbours ; if they will but shew so much Respect to public Religion, as duly to attend the Instructions of the Church, and use their common Reason and Memory about these heavenly Things of everlasting Moment, as they are wont to do in worldly Matters ; upon those Days and Times especially which are set apart by the Laws of God and Man, from worldly, to those heavenly Purposes. How then can any, the meanest of the People of common Understanding in our Country, that so much abounds with Light and Knowledge, have the Face to pretend Ignorance, and offer that as a Plea for their gross Immoralities, their common but execrable Profaneness ? Can they believe or imagine otherwise, but that their Plea will be rejected, and

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they charged at the last Day, as impious Contemners of God and their own Souls, for chusing and loving Darknes rather than Light, though such a Profusion of Light was come unto them. And if none are so blind and deaf, as those who will not see and hear ; and if there is no obeying and practising without previous Knowledge of Duty, and no Salvation in this Land without Obedience, what they reckoned upon as their Excuse, must necessarily prove their greater Condemnation.

II. Let it be remarked in the next Place, that what may bear the Name of Sins of Infirmity, and admit of Excuse in some Persons, in some Circumstances and Cases, may yet in other Persons, in other Circumstances, be truly reckoned in the Number of Sins that partake of Wilfulness and Presumption. As if one Man, uniformed of some Specialities of Duty in doubtful Cases, yet not blame-worthy for it, should be found transgressing in such Instances as are not so manifest and plain, his Transgression becomes a Sin of Infirmity, a secret Fault ; but in another more knowing, it assumes the Character of a known willing Default, because against Knowledge, and consequently criminal and voluntary ; for who knows his Duty, and does it not, of him it is true, that to him it is Sin. Again, the same Sort of Sin may be wilful in one, if committed with Deliberation, yet in another, no more than Frailty and Infirmity, if committed through Surprise or the like : Drunkenness for Instance, may for once steal upon a sober Man, through Ignorance of the Strength of the Liquor ; and may come deliberately, with pleasing Gust and welcome Health, upon a Sot and customary Drinker : To one it is a Sin of Surreption, to the other of crying and habitual Presumption.—The full Consent of the Will is that which

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which measures the Guilt and Obliquity of the Offence before God, who will rate it accordingly, and hold every one of us either guilty or guiltless, as he knows our Hearts.

III. It is to be noted for our Safety and Innocence, that neither the Strength nor the Charms of a Temptation can properly denominate our Disobedience, in yielding thereto, a Sin of Infirmary; though the Suddenness of some other Temptations in lesser Matters, may alleviate and apologize for us. Because God in all the great Branches of our Obedience has promised and undertaken, that he will not suffer us to be tempted above what we are able, be the Temptation ever so charming, or the Opportunity ever so inviting; provided we have what we ought never to be without, the Presence of Mind of having Recourse to our Obligations not to comply, and then apply to him for his promised Aid in Time of Need. In the

IVth Place, we should in particular consider well and observe, that those Sins of Infirmary which might easily be amended, at least lessened by us, if through Supineness and Incogitancy we suffer them to multiply and get Ground upon us by Indulgence, they grow up to the Stature of wilful Ones: As if we should make a Practice of throwing off all Care and Guard over the Province of our Heart, which is the Seed-plot and Source of all wilful Iniquity. For Lust, when it is conceived there, bringeth forth Sin, and Sin when it is finished in Action bringeth forth Death. Every great Sinner begins first with small Sins; and he that sinneth by little and little, shall, as the wise Man forewarns, perish by little and little. The Beginnings of Anger, Contention, and whatsoever Passion becomes evil by Excess, must be watched and attended to, as we would prevent being answerable

to distinguish and conduct ourselves in the Course for the Mischiefs and Follies that are like to follow after; for though it may be a Frailty at the first Rise, by Perseverance, it will certainly become sinful.—Therefore, neither in the irascible or concupiscible Affections of our Nature, is that to be reckoned a Sin of Weakness and Infirmary which we fall into by an habitual Neglect of the proper Means, and appointed Preservations that would have secured us from it.—Neither he that offends out of Strength of evil Custom and Habit, and perhaps does not know that he offends, can plead his Infirmary for so doing (as is the Case of customary Swearers and Liars); for the Habit was both sinful and preventable in its first Acts, and therefore if he has wickedly taken Pains to superinduce upon himself a controuling Habit of such Superfluity of Naughtiness, and such a Habit in the Course of Things grows into second Nature, and so has perverted the Nature that God has given, into one that is worse; he has none to accuse, none to impute it to but himself. If he sins as it were naturally and necessarily, and unknowingly, he may thank himself for it, his acquired Infirmary becomes his deplorable Ruin. For a Habit in Sin takes away, as it were, a Man's Right and Title of recovering himself out of it; and therefore it is most elegantly expressed in Scripture Language, that such a one has *sold* himself to work Wickedness; he has mortgaged his Redeemer, he has sold out the Equity of Redemption.—These, and such as these, are Occasions of Sin of our own making, and consequently voluntary; for being wilful in the Beginning and Original, they must be interpreted to be chosen also in the Growth and Issues of them; for we are ever and most justly to be accounted, before God and Man, to be the Authors of what-

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whatever follows from a Cause of our own making.
In the fifth and last Place,

V. Be it promiscuously observed by all here present, that the Wicked and Profane, who delight and allow themselves in Sin, must not, ought not to take any Umbrage from hence, to lessen their Immoralities, or range their Impieties under the soft Name of Sins of Infirmary : Because, say they, the Good and Holy, with all their Endeavours, cannot live clear of all Sin, therefore we are all alike. But it is most notoriously true against them, and they themselves in their serious Thoughts are not able to gain-say it, that the Nature of Things, the obvious Notions of Morality, and the common Reading of Scripture, all reclaim against such a Confusion of Characters ; and that there is a vast and wide Difference with regard to each of them, between the Sins of one and the other. For is there no Difference, is there not a vast Distance (I presume to say East and West, North and South,) in the Positions of Man's Behaviour, and the Points of human Conduct ; insomuch, that the Tendency to the one is a Contrariety to the other ; and the Perseverance in one, which is opposite to Right, is the Consummation, and not the Excuse of being in the Wrong ? Does not Morality and common Sense make a Difference between great and little Trespases ? Does not Scripture distinguish between Sins unto Death, and those that are not so ? ——— But because very many of our Congregations are apt to take Refuge where there is none to be found in the Gospel of *Christ*, or that Covenant of Grace they confide in ; and forasmuch as the contrary Sins of Presumption will best serve to illustrate those of Infirmary and themselves ; and as it is the best Casuistry and Stability we can be Masters of, to be able upon all Occasions

of our Lives; I should proceed to speak of the more notorious Guilt of wilful and presumptuous Sins; how utterly inconsistent they are with our Christian Obligations, and destructive of the divine Life; that they alleviate the Spirit of God, and cut off all Hopes of Salvation so long as they are persisted in; and that they are every Way replete with Folly, and upon all Accounts full of infinite Danger and unspeakable Hazard.—But of this at another Opportunity.





S E R M O N

The Third.

The Nature of presumptuous Sins, as distinguished from those of Infirmary; their beinous Guilt.

The second Sermon on P S A L. xix. 12, 13.

Who can understand his Errors? Cleanse thou me from secret Faults.

Keep thy Servant also from presumptuous Sins: Let them not have the Dominion over me; then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great Transgression.

IN my last Discourse, I shewed the true Nature and Character of Sins of Infirmary: That they are involuntary Deflections from the perfect Rule of our Duty, being unsupported by the Choice, the Design, or Desire of the Will; which is the moral Agent of human Duty, and human Transgression. That they have their Rise from Ignorance unaffected; from Prejudices in weak, but upright Minds; from Inadvertency, relaxing that Spiritual Guard, which will sometimes intermit in the most Vigilant, through Forgetfulness of the Spirit, or Weariness of the Flesh; from Surprise, thro' the Suddenness of a Temptation;

from the present Union of the Body with the Soul ; from the particular Constitution of some, and the casual Disorder of others : All which Causes being for the most part unavoidable, the Effects will of Course be of the like Kind. As in the first Incitements to Sin ; the Rise and Starting of evil Thoughts in the Mind at all Seasons ; the imperfect Manner of performing our most Spiritual Duties ; the casual Commission of some rash and improper Acts ; and in many Omissions, with respect to Opportunities of doing Good, or of some Circumstances of the Good we did, which would have added to, and made it much better : Some, or all of which, more or less, have been, and ever will be, incident to the very best Christians : Nor are they to be avoided, or wholly mastered, by the wisest, during our State of Imperfection in the Body ; which Body, at the Original Creation, was ordained an Helpmeet to the Soul, in Duty and Service to God ; but after Sin entered thro' bodily Appetite, the Equilibrium, or Balance, has, in Fact, been altered, and the Body has ever since been a Clog to that Perfection of Duty, which the Soul of Man throughout all the Regions of the Earth naturally pants after. — And, as I made it appear, from the Nature of the Gospel Covenant, that, as long as they are displeasing to, and resisted by us, they are truly pitiable ; and perhaps, as easily forgiven of God, as they are committed by us ; by us, especially striving against them, and not encouraging their Progress ; and, that they are expiable on our Part, by Prayers to be cleansed in general of all those numberless Faults : I proceeded moreover, to shew, when Sins of Infirmary changed the Scene, and ceased to be such, and first began to take the Imputation of wilful Sins ; as when they proceed from a chosen Ignorance ; from a voluntary indulging and delighting in the primary

mary Suggestions and Occasions of Iniquity ; from a wilful Neglect of the Means to suppress and conquer them ; or from such a super-induced Habit and Custom of Sinning, which scarcely knows when it sins, and much less knows how to desist : These are *one* of the several Degrees and Kinds of wilful and presumptuous Sins in general, which I made myself responsible in my last Discourse to treat of at this Time. And I am about to acquit myself of it, in discoursing,

- I. Of the Nature of presumptuous Sins, as differing from those of Infirmary.
- II. The enormous Guilt of them ; their tremendous Danger, and the prodigious Folly and Fallacy of the Grounds they proceed upon.

It is of an unspeakable evil Consequence to the Souls of Men in the Examination of themselves, and their Title to Heaven, to mistake and miscall wilful Sins of Presumption, by the soft, favourable Name, of Sins of Infirmary : Because such a Mistake persisted in, fatally silences the Checks, and, at last, shuts up the Mouth of Conscience ; prevents Repentance and Amendment, as a needless Thing, and so effectually excludes from Heaven, and the Favour and Fruition of God ; whilst the Sinner, by so agreeable an Imposition upon himself, fondly dreams of a sure Title, and vainly presumes on a good Interest in both, contrary to all the declared Conditions, Assurances, and Hopes of the Gospel. Self-deceit is the sweetest and commonest Error in human Life ; and the Sin of one's Complexion, (and no Man living is without a Bias and Tendency to it, some more than to others,) is the greatest Flatterer in the World ; the Affections being gained over, and too much devoted to it, the Judgment is warped, is most unwilling to

to be convinced where the Truth is displeasing, and is so much against the Grain of the present Indulgence, that it grows at least very partial, if not blind of that Side; extremely ready to admit any Thing that can be said, or thought of, in Excuse and Mitigation of it. A Bosom Favourite is the last Thing that will be given up; and it is so difficult to part with, that the Majority chuse to die in its Embraces. To remedy this, it is worthy of our common Safety, to consider the Nature and Species of presumptuous Iniquities, and level all the evident Marks of it at that lurking, deadly Enemy within us, which is too much countenanc'd, and too often listened too, under the Disguise of a Friend that is falsely agreeable, and continually deceiving us.— Now these Sort of Iniquities sufficiently describe themselves to the Conscience of the Offender, (for God, just and due in all his Ways and Discoveries to Man, has not left himself without Witness and Distinction of those Parasites of our Peace and Happiness, which are really *our* Enemies, and for that Reason his;) that is, as oft as any one sins against the Rebukes of his own Mind, the previous Dissuasions, and After-Accusations of his Conscience, that divine Monitor, that Justice of the inward Peace, that minor Judge of God's Truth and Righteousness set up in every Man's Breast, upon Occasion of, and in perpetual Memory and Demonstration of the Fall of Man, and of his once better pristine State. This is an universal clear Revelation of God, and likewise an obscure Intimation of the other over the Face of the whole Earth. But, with us, and it rises, when Sin is committed against the clear Knowledge and Recollection of the revealed Law of God, commanding or prohibiting the direct contrary to what is about to be committed, or omitted; when, notwithstanding Life and Death, Heaven and Hell, the
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Wrath and the Favour of God are believed, without Question, to be the sure Consequence of his determining and acting one Way or the other, tho' they stare him in the Face ; yet advisedly and deliberately, he suffers the false Counsels and Temptations of the Flesh and Sense, of the World and the Devil, to prevail over his Reason, to master his better Part reluctantly, and to break the Commandment of his Master interposing, and baffle the Design of his Redeemer and Sanctifier, leading him off by the Hand another Way. And all for the Sake of what ? For a Feather of some momentary Pleasure or Profit ; whilst he stands by and sees that Feather put into the Scale, and permits it, and helps it to weigh down himself, and all his Substance, together with his Inheritance of Crowns, and Reversion of Glory. — What can be more contemptibly senseless, foolish, and inconsiderate, in a Creature of Sense and Reason, in so considerable a Creature as Man is under God ? And consequently, what can be more displeasing and provoking to him, than to see his own Pains and Design in making us, and his Grace, moreover, in revealing his Will to us, thus traversed, and both set at naught by us, by such flagrant Instances of transgressing against him ? What Excuse can be devised even by the Pitifulness of God's great Mercy for such an Offender ? Want of knowing better, Want of some Consideration, Want of Checks, Dehortation of Conscience, Want of the Assistance of God's Spirit, can any of these be pleaded in Abatement ? No ; not of them can be pretended to, any otherwise than so many Aggravations of the Sin. — Whereas Sins of Infirmary are of the unavoidable Kind ; and if they break any Command, it is unwittingly, and not by Design. Deliberation might be wanting, but Deliberation could not wholly

wholly prevent it. But these of Presumption, are Violations with Eyes open, Reason looking on, and Conscience reclaiming all at the same Time, and against the same Action. The other were slid into of a sudden, or in a Passion; these, with Pause, and some Deliberation, and taking Advice first of the spiritual, and then of the fleshly Part, and, after hearing both, preferring the latter to the former; and all Deliberation in the inward Man supposes some Comparison of Fears and Hopes; some Arguings and Debates upon the Motives of Action, and the Difference of Action; it includes a weighing and poizing together the Desires of the Flesh and the Spirit, demanding contrary Things. One is done without thinking upon God, or Recollection of Duty; the other postpones the Light of each, and puts them both under a Bushel, whilst he regales his irregular Appetites for the Flesh and World. The former intended not to offend the Almighty and most merciful Father; but the presumptuous Sinner, not forgetting him, or his Commandments, is resolved to please and gratify himself, let who will be displeased at it, and let what will come of it; and for so long sets up his Will against God's, sins with an high Hand, and with a stiff Neck withdraws his Obedience, and flies out into Rebellion.—Sins of the first Sort bewray what cannot be long concealed, Human Weakness; they argue and suppose Inadvertency of Mind, or not so perfect Government and Mastery over the Passions: But the presumptuous Kind bespeaks the Transgressor to be touched with Wickedness in Grain, and a growing Debauch in the Vitals of his Morality; I mean his Will, his elective Faculty of Good and Evil; his inward Man, the Root of good or bad Fruit; the Fountain of the Soul, or clear Streams of his Conversation.

verfation. But in Departure from the Will of its Maker, how can the Will of Man assume to be any Rule or Justification of any Thing that differs from the other? Is not the Will of God stated and fettled in the relation of Things many Ages before the other? Is it not its Author, Rule, and Pattern? Is not, was not the Will of Man made after the Image of the other, to comply with the fame in all the Laws of his Righteousness and good Pleasure? And must not that necessarily be the Glory, the Excellence, the Likeness, the Duty, the Wisdom, and Righteousness of Man? —If *thy Heart condemns thee, God is greater than thy Heart, and knoweth all Things.* The Will of God, therefore, being the Measure of all that is right and best, the invariable Standard of our Duty, and the *Pole-Star* of our constant Observation; when the Will of Man by wicked Deeds grows wilful, and refractory to Direction, and acts in Opposition to the other, and in Spite of all Convictions, Monitions, and Dissuasives to the contrary, is inflexible from evil Courses, this constitutes Sin in its highest Degree, and makes it become exceeding sinful. And the more any Transgression partakes of this, the more heinous and black, the less excusable and more damnable it is: It must needs be of the deepest Dye of Pollution, of the largest Size of Deformity and Turpitude, and of the heaviest Load and Weight of Guilt. Because such Iniquity alters the very Constitution and Complexion of the Soul, subverts its Love and Regard for God, and intercepts God's Love and Favour towards it: They are *the Sins unto Death*, which sink the Sinner down to the Perdition and Destruction of ungodly Men, in case a particular timely Repentance, and an effectual Amendment, does not prevent; if God, peradventure, should give them Repentance, after having sinned in so

audacious a Manner, and continued so to do by a long Habit. —But Sins of Infirmity deprave not the Temper or Religion of the Soul, nor viciate its Sincerity and Integrity ; they weigh light, tho' they are many, in the Balance of the Gospel ; they intercept not the Light of God's Countenance, nor the Intercourse of the Aids of the Spirit now, nor damage the Assurance of a blessed Recompence hereafter. Tho' all Men are Sinners, and come short of their Duty, and that Glory of God which consisted in making Man once upright, and capable of committing no Manner of Fault ; yet this sufficiently maintains the Distinction between Saints and Sinners, the Righteous and Ungodly : And they are as different in their Sins, as they shall be hereafter in their States of Heaven and Hell. For no sincere Christian, or Servant of God, (tho' he may have been guilty once or twice) can bear long with himself in continuing to transgress after the Similitude of *presumptuous* Crimes, which the other lives in, and perseveres to be a Slave to ; notwithstanding he sometimes feels the inward Pain of condemning himself for his Folly and Wretchedness : But the sincere Christian condemns himself effectually into Repentance and Relinquishment of every wilful Sin ; improving his inward Struggle so well and wisely, as to lead Captivity captive, and gain a Conquest and a Triumph over that Vice, which was bent upon conquering him, and making a Slave and a Fool of him. This puts the Difference, and preserves the Distinction, between the faithful Servant of God, that has but one Master, and the pretended one, who has two ; between the upright Liver, the *Israelite* indeed, who has no Guile nor Doubling in him, and the hypocritical Pretender to Religion ; between the real and the no Christian ; between him that is one inwardly, and to Purpose, as well as outwardly so, and him that

that lives and dies in the outward Profession, and yet indulges himself most inconsistently in some presumptuous Transgression. For, in Parity of Reasoning, *he is not a Christian, who is one outwardly, neither is that Baptism which is outward in the Flesh : But he is a Christian, who is one inwardly ; and Baptism is that of the Heart, in the Spirit, and not in the Letter, whose Praise is not of Men, but of God.*

And it is carefully to be observed by us all, that one such Sin, being of the deadly Kind, continued in, and unforsoaken by Repentance and Amendment, is sufficient to ruin and undo any one of us : One mortal Wound can as surely destroy Life as many ; and therefore we ought to be aware that every presumptuous Sin is like running upon the Sword's Point. And, as by the Christian Revelation, Damnation is the declared Portion of every Sinner in such a Kind, whoever indulges therein, and escapes not by timely Repentance, and Alteration of this Life, is fast in that Snare of the Devil, and for so long ceases to be penitent or religious ; he remains the Servant of Sin, a Prey to the Devil, an Apostate from God, and a compleat Breaker of his Commandments. For this Kind of contemptuous Disobedience implies in it an universal Guiltiness and Disobedience to all that God would restrain and reform us from ; it supposes and includes the Breach of the whole Law. For, whoever dispenses with himself in breaking one Commandment (his Conscience reclaiming and protesting against the Commission of that Action, and the Violation of that Law) would, upon another Temptation, equally strong, and equally agreeable to him, boggle not to violate any or all of the rest. If the Authority of God, which ought to have been the Restraint and Dissuasive, was incompetent, and of no Force with respect to one Point of

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Commandment, it can be of no greater Power, and will be as little respected in any other; because it presides equally over all, and is not less, nor less valid in one, than it is in another.

How certain is it then, that every Bosom Sin, of every one here present, ought to give the Alarm, since it is that which so easily besets them, and is so apt, and does so often, in fact, cheat them into an Opinion, that it is a Sin only of Infirmity, as being so great a Favourite with them, and their particular Inclination deeply engaged with it; (and nothing but a Favourite, or false Friend, we know, is able to prevail with a wise Person, to give into any Measures that are eventually ruinous!) And, as every one has their Infirmity, even the best of People, who go to Heaven, they also hope for Admission thither, whilst they gratify themselves therein, and never think of forsaking, as long as they can enjoy it. Is it not a little one, says the bribed Understanding, is it not a single one, says the slavish corrupt Conscience, and my Soul shall live?—But let God and Reason ask, why it is a little one?—They have nothing to say, but because they have a great Affection for it. Or, if the Question is put, how long it will be a single one, they have not a Word to answer, but must contradict themselves; for Sin being the Engine of the Devil, having once got Footing, is not idle and solitary, but presently multiplies and fortifies itself according to its treacherous Nature: Like a Thief, that is come to rob your House, he opens the Doors, and lets in others, his Companions. —Therefore, let this ruinous Fallacy be shut out of Door by every attentive Soul here present.—For, if it is in an Instance plainly forbidden, that which you would fain make the Excuse, becomes the very Test and Testimony of your Obedience. If you obey, where, according to the particular
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Frame of your Constitution, you meet with no Temptation, because you had no Inclination that way, what Thanks have ye? Can you call that Virtue where there is no Victory, nor any assailing Enemy?—But where God has put the Test of your Constitution, and mark'd out the Commandment accordingly, and given you Notice of it; then, and there, to resist, deny yourself, and obey God, is the gallant, the critical Effort of your Reason, and the glorious Triumph of your Christianity: All other and After-Obedience (the grand Obstacle being removed) will happily follow of Course, and rejoice the Soul; which will further receive a Testimonial from Heaven, that it is in great Favour there, and, that as *Christ* is gone before and has prepared the Way, there is nothing to hinder its Entrance thither. There the Crown waits them for their Fidelity in overcoming the only Obstruction to their present and future Happiness.—But was peculiar Propension, and constitutional Inclination to Sin, admitted as an Excuse, or allowed to extenuate it into a Sin of Infirmary, at this Rate, every gross Immorality must be tolerated and encouraged by the Lawgiver; because some or other had a strong genial Tendency to the same, and therefore did commit it with some sort of Pleasure, and without any Hesitation. I except only one particular Species, and that is the execrable Habit of Cursing and Swearing, for which, I confess, I never yet heard of any Plea from any Man's Constitution to favour it; and, therefore, that must certainly remain one of the most cursed Sins in the black List of Reprobation. At this Rate, I say, what Sinner would not readily compound the Matter with God, and willingly article with his Maker, to perform all the rest of his Commandments, provided he would wink at the Breach of one or two, which thwarted their dear Right

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Hand, or Right Eye, Sin.—Be not, I beseech you, Brethren, deceived with this defeated Fallacy of Sin, but believe the true Teacher of our Danger, and of our Happiness; that one of those Sins, unforsaken, will spoil all our Religion, and completely undo our Hopes of Heaven. Whilst the Soul delighteth, or goeth on in such sensual, worldly Gratifications, as are declared Abominations to God, they have nothing less to expect, but that their Prayers, like their Actions, will be alike Abomination to him; and that they themselves shall receive the Portion of Hypocrites.

There are others, who continue in wilful presumptuous Iniquity, and at the same Time presume upon Salvation, and assume to themselves a Right to Heaven, through the willing Delusion of some false Principles, which have no Foundation in Scripture, nor receive any Countenance from the true Purpose and Design of the Gospel.—

Some make a Shift to support themselves, and lull their Consciences asleep upon the Sufficiency of a Death-bed Repentance, to atone an offended God, and make their Peace with him only at their last Moments. Others, in another Communion, are sadly abused in their false Reliance upon the undelegated Power of a Priest, to absolve Man authoritatively at the last, upon the least Signs of Sorrow, though it is a Sorrow that they cannot live to sin any longer. But there is no need of refuting this in this Place. — There are others, who, like the *Pharisees* of old, trust in themselves that they are righteous, and despise others, yet are full of Iniquity and Hypocrisy: This is the sanctified Generation, clean and pure in their own Eyes, yet are not washed from their Filthiness. They either, by an assuming strong Faith, roll themselves upon *Christ's* Merits, grow very fond of him, and

and hug him as a Pillow, to repose their Sins quietly upon ; without being persuaded of the Necessity of forsaking them ; of becoming new Creatures, and leading a new Life ; never considering that the Design of *Christ*, and his Religion, is to bring them to Repentance, in ceasing to do Evil, and learning to do Well, and daily advancing in the indispensable Duty of leading sober, righteous, and godly Lives in this World : Not reflecting, that there is no Merit in *Christ* for any Sinner but the penitent one, and he that makes a Conscience, and sets about the Reformation of his Heart and Manners, and perseveres in that good Deed. *For the Foundation of God's Mercy in Christ standeth sure, having this Seal, or Mark, he that nameth the Name of Christ, let him depart from all Iniquity.*— Or, they fondly fancy themselves to be absolutely predestinated to eternal Life, and are the very Children of God, elect and precious, and consequently, that he must needs wink at the beloved Sins of his Favourites ; alledging, that he *sees not Iniquity in Jacob, nor Perverseness in Israel his chosen* : Therefore they think themselves safe in their Sins, and are in no Fear of being saved. — But if the true Meaning of God's not seeing Iniquity in *Jacob*, is, that he approves, or allows, or likes it not in his People, as the Word often signifies ; and if there is no Token of Faith in the Heart, but from corresponding Works in the Life ; nor Signs of Grace, but in the gracious Fruits of a good Conversation ; nor any other Mark or Evidence laid down in Scripture, of being the Child of God, or born of him ; or any manifest Difference between the Children of God and the Children of the Devil, but from their doing or not doing of Righteousness ; and, if these Marks and Criteria are so plainly laid down, that every one may be his own Casuist, and clearly judge beforehand what he

is to expect hereafter : Then all other Marks, Signs, or Tokens of Election to eternal Life, Regeneration, Pangs of the New Birth, &c. must be fanciful and pretended ; can be no other than the Invention of Man, and a dangerous Delusion to those who trust to them.

Is not St. *John* (1st Epist. iii. 7, 8, &c.) very explicit, with respect to *Christ* and his Merits ? *Whosoever abideth in Christ sinneth not ; and whosoever sinneth* (lives in a Course of presumptuous Sin) *has not seen Christ, nor known him.* And, with respect of being the Elect, or Children of God : *In this the Children of God and the Children of the Devil are manifest : He that doth not Righteousness is not of God : He that is born of God, sinneth not ; neither, indeed, can be.* i. e. Notwithstanding he may be obnoxious to Infirmities, and commit some Sins not unto Death ; yet the spiritual Life, which was regenerated from the Seed, or Word of God, may nevertheless remain in him ; and such is “ the inward Frame of Heart and Disposition of his Spirit, as renders Sin exceeding odious and hateful to him, so that he *cannot* entertain the Thoughts of doing it without the utmost Detestation, and the greatest Horror ; and so can very rarely, and only through Surprise, or Want of due Deliberation, or thro’ such violent Temptations as prevent or hinder his Consideration, be obnoxious to Sin ; and when he comes to consider of such an Action, is presently condemning himself for it, bitterly repenting, and for the Future watching most carefully against it.” *

And here it may be requisite, whilst we are treating of the Nature and Kind of presumptuous Sins, and before we proceed to the Guilt and Danger of them, to observe, That there are Degrees in these Sins, and more or less of Presumption and Malignity in them : Some are more crying and fla-

* *Whistly* on the Place.

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grant; as being more injurious to Society and Religion, than others; and every wilful Transgression admits of several enhancing Aggravations from the Circumstances the Sinner is in. As, when committed with Doubt in the Mind, which is one sort of Check of Conscience; for whatever is not of Faith, or full Persuasion of the Lawfulness of the Action, is Sin. Or when, against clear Knowledge to the contrary, there springs up an inexcusable Aggravation, according to *Rom. i. 32. Who knowing the Judgments of God against such Things, not only do them, but take Pleasure in them that do them, so that they are without Excuse*, says the Apostle. *If ye were blind*, says our Lord, *ye would have had no Sin; but now ye say, we see, therefore your Sin remaineth*. As to the Sins of this Age, they are not, God knows, the Sins of Ignorance; we glory in Light, and at the same Time, too many, to their Shame, glory in Sin.—Or, if persisted in after Mercies and Judgments sent on purpose to reclaim the Sinner. This was a most provoking Circumstance, and a terrible Charge against the *Jewish* Nation, who hardened their Necks, and sinned yet more in Spite of Plagues, and in Sight of Deliverances sent expressly from Heaven, either to have melted or terrified them into better Obedience; and that takes in all Tempers.—Or, if committed thro' little or no Temptation, as in the Case of customary Swearing and Blaspheming, so rife in this Age; for if the Presence, or the Pressure of a Temptation, is not of Weight always to excuse Sin, how defenceless, how abandoned and shameful is this, in the Absence and the utter Want of any Encouragement from any Temptation whatsoever? It appears, in its true Colours, to be sinning for sinning Sake, and merely because it is forbidden by, and hateful to, God. It seems to be an utter Void of Consideration, or, as if Reason

son and Recollection had taken a long Journey from Man, and bid him farewell ; because it is so plainly making court to, and complimenting the Devil, as being the Language of him and his infernal Court, with all the most stupid Prostitution and Drudgery in his Service, without having any Manner of Compensation for it, either from the World, or the Flesh. — Or, if you suppose the Sin, (a Case, I hope, you will never admit of) repeated after repeated Vows of Amendment, you must in your Conscience acknowledge, that it rises every Time higher in Presumption ; like a Criminal, who had his Life given him upon Promise of better Obedience, returning, nevertheless, again and again to his Crimes. — Or, in short, which seems to be the peculiar Enormity, and heightening Characteristick of these sort of Sins, whensoever, and wheresoever, they are perpetrated with Deliberation, Thought, and Counsel. And this brings the Matter home to the Text : For, was not Adultery and Murder the two enormous Sins, and each of them, singly, *the great Transgression*, which our *Psalmist* himself, this same sorrowful Penitent, had been himself guilty of ? And were they not, according to the History, both committed in Consideration, Fore-cast, and Contrivance ? And, notwithstanding he was guilty of numbering the People, and of some other Distrust of God, as well as repining against him when under the Persecutions of *Saul*, and of some other Faults ; yet, God, who is not extreme to mark what we do amiss, in the Spirit of the Divine History passes them all over, in the Character given of him in those holy Books ; and represents and speaks of him in *1 King. xv. 5.* as *having done that which was right in the Eyes of the Lord, and not turned aside from any Thing that was commanded him all the Days of his Life, save only in the Mat-ter*

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ter of Uriah the Hittite. Because all, and every his other Sins and Failings, were easily pardoned, as not having such a full Consent of the Will. But this complicated, this multiplied Iniquity of his, cost him many temporal Punishments; some of them (so just and exactly righteous is God sometimes in this World!) Punishments of the same Kind, Murder and Adultery, Incest and Rebellion, and moreover in his own Family; and brought him, over and above, under a long Course of Sorrow and Repentance, for so greatly transgressing against so great and good a God; notwithstanding the Prophet assured him, that God had put away his Sin, and he should not die. It is plain, however, that the Provocation and Presumption was so great, that it, for a Time, alienated the Spirit of God from him; in the Sense of which he prays the Lord in his Penitential, the 11th *Psal.* made for that very Purpose, to *renew a right Spirit within him*: Forasmuch as that irregular Indulgence had sunk his Mind and Faculties, which used to mount upwards to purer Objects, into Flesh and Sense, and their Sentiments only, for a long Time. It is clear, that he continued insensible of his Condition pretty near nine Months, how much above is uncertain; 'till *Nathan* the Prophet was sent, not in a public Manner, before all his Subjects, but in a private, respectful, parabolical Application, to make him condemn himself into the Justice of not being able to deny, when urged by the Man of God to his Conscience, but that *he was the Man*; and thus snatched him as a Firebrand out of the Fire, that had taken hold of him, and was going to make a Prey of him: And, therefore, all other wilful Sins, which have the Similitude of so much Presumption, are the *great* Transgression, which he fervently beseeches God in the Text to be preserved upright and innocent from. Which brings on my

II. Proposal, which was to represent the enormous Guilt of them, their tremendous Danger, and the prodigious Folly and Fallacy of the Grounds they proceed upon.

With respect to the Guilt, few Words may suffice after what has been said. Now, the Guilt is not to be measured from the Tendency any of our wilful Sins have to do any Injury to God ; for that is impossible, and needs no Proof ; and, therefore, says the Sinner in his Heart, *there is no God.* — No God, at least to be so displeased, and resent it at so high a Rate as Preachers represent the Matter from Scripture, since he is not, nor can be in the least *injured* thereby in the Plenitude of his Happiness. — But the Sinner is to know this one Thing, as he is a Man, and Creature of God's making, (and that will set him right in the true Reason of Things) that his Guiltiness consists in the Stubbornness and Refractoriness of his Temper, in not submitting his Will to God's, but setting up his partial, purblind Will against his Maker's, as fitter to take Place in the Conduct and Government over his Actions ; refusing to be governed by him ; tho' the Glory of his moral Government over Man, and of all the Laws and Rules of it, consist in nothing else but in their Tendency and Direction to our true Good, for securing our Happiness in this World and the next ; by teaching us to know God and Ourselves ; how Sin and moral Evil entered into the World, and what Woe and Wretchedness, Shame and Servitude, redound from a Continuance in it ; who is our best Friend, and who our real, and our worst Enemy ; and, by detecting Snares, hinder our own Degeneracy and Rashness, from hurting ourselves ; wherein our internal Liberty and Tranquility consists, and how,
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and thro' what Mediator our Peace is settled with God, and our Sin pardoned, and what is to be done on our Part to effect it ; where is the Stage of Man's Trial, and when the Time of our Probation, and how uncertain a Thing is that Time, and yet how much depends upon it ; what are the two Futurities which await the Obedient and Disobedient in this Life ; and that the Use of Man's Reason, or any Pretence to Wisdom, is lost and perished as to himself, in his Folly and Presumption, in either preferring the Pleasures, or fearing the Endurances of a *Short Season*, in Comparison of the great unspeakable Eternity of each of them, which is ensuing, and must be our Portion forevermore. Now, if the presumptuous, headstrong Son of every Christian, contravenes all and every of those great and gracious Rules and Measures ; if it sets up itself to contradict and subvert these blessed Laws and Policies of Heaven for our Salvation from Misery, and Entrance into everlasting Felicity, you cannot surely think it a small Matter ; you must needs acknowledge the Guilt to be heinous, yea, very notorious, before all rational Creatures, yourselves being Judges, nay, tho' yourselves are Parties. — They must be Scoundrels in Guilt, and abandoned Prostitutes in Iniquity, (which I hope and believe none here are,) who can imagine, that, what is so great a Contradiction to the Reason of Things, and has the Impudence to depose God from his Right of Governing the whole World, his Creature Man, as we all are ; or, that That, which is so manifest a Transgression of the great Law of the Creation, and of the more great and gracious Kindness of Redemption, is not an Iniquity of a high Provocation, and a deep Dye : And yet, who can deny, that the wilful Transgressions of us Christians are not of that Class ; or are not entered in the black List of Exclusion out of Heaven, in case
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any one here should be so mad as to continue in them? — But they have nothing to fear, they have Reason to rejoice, that tho' their Sins should blush like Scarlet, and be as many in Number as the Stars of Heaven, yet the God of Heaven is prone and desirous to forgive them all, and restore them to Peace and Happiness in *Christ* our Saviour, upon a speedy Repentance, and worthy Amendment. In order to induce the Sinner to this, seeing the Danger, the Folly, and Fallacy in continuing in them, is even greater than the Guilt, I should proceed to treat of these likewise; but that must be reserved to a future Consideration.

Now to God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, be universal Honour, and eternal Glory, from henceforth and for ever.



SERMON

The Fourth.

The tremendous Danger of presumptuous Sin from three Properties of it.

The third Sermon on P S A L. xix. 12, 13.

Who can understand his Errors? or, as in the Psalter, Who can tell how often he offendeth? Cleanse thou me from secret Faults.

Keep thy Servant also from presumptuous Sins: Let them not have the Dominion over me; then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great Transgression.

AT my first Entrance upon the Subject of these Words, I proposed Three Things.

- I. To state the Nature of Sins of Infirmary.
- II. The Nature of presumptuous Sins, as differing from those of Infirmary; the comparative Innocence of the former, and the enormous Guilt of the latter.
- III. The tremendous Danger, with the prodigious Folly and Fallacy of the Grounds whereon presumptuous Iniquity proceeds and runs its Course.

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The two first Heads have been discussed in my two last Discourses. And seeing the Danger, Folly, and Fallacy usually attending and closely following the Perpetration of those Sins, are even greater than their heinous Guilt, (forasmuch as God is more inclined to forgive, than Sinners are to forsake that Kind of Sin) it is proper for us now to proceed to take these likewise into our Consideration; as they are comprised in those Words of the Text, *Let them not have the Dominion over me.*—Now this horrible Danger, which so commonly overtakes the presumptuous Sinner, and too often proves fatal and ruinous to him, flows as a natural Consequence from the very Nature of Sin. No Wonder that so much Mischiefe is done, and such extreme Hazard is incurred, as is often lamented, and most affectionately and vehemently warned against in the Scriptures of Truth; if it all arises out of the Nature of Things, and grows out of it as the worst of Fruits do from the worst of Trees.

Having not Time to recount all the pernicious Properties of Sin, I confine myself at this present to touch upon some of the most notorious.

I. One melancholy Effect of wilful Sin, is its *darkening Property*. God has set an Eye on the Mind, and wrote therein the bright Discernment of moral Good and Evil, for the Regulation of its Virtue; and the Attainment of its present and future Happiness, as he is a moral Agent, as certainly as he has set an Eye in the Body of Man, as a natural Agent, for chusing the best, and avoiding the worst Road. The great Light of our Life, of our best and most enduring Life, has told us of this, and of the dismal Events and dark Issues of it. *The Light of the Body is the Eye, and consequently the Light of the Mind is the Eye of the Mind: If therefore the Light that is in thee be Dark-*

Darkness, how great is that Darkness? So great, as it implies there is no Comparison, and that the Loss of Sight in the bodily Eye is nothing to it. This is meant of the Extremity and habitual Perversity of Sinning against Light. And not only the Understanding, but the Will and Affections of a Man are counter-acted and perverted also by it, to that strange Degree, as to grow enamoured of what he naturally hates, and *loves Darkness rather than Light, because his Deeds are evil.* There must then be some gradual Progress to this unnatural and most unhappy State of a Sinner, which he is unwilling to be aware of, though he is faithfully and frequently warned against it. And how is this fearful and deplorable Condition superinduced upon any one in an enlightened Age, but by tampering with the Light, and transgressing wilfully against its Direction? When the Eye of the Mind chuses to wink at the Commission of such Sort of deliberate Sin; that very Sin, after the Commission, especially repeated Commission, like a subtle Adversary, draws a Film over the Eye, so that the Man cannot, or will not see so plain as he could before; and so makes its Game, and plays upon him successfully afterwards upon his blind Side.

Now as Sin is a Transgression of the Law, its darkening and eclipsing Property must needs be confessed and acknowledged by us all, who so well know that the *Law of God is a Light unto our Feet, and a Lanthorn unto our Paths.* Where the Light loses its Purpose of directing, and the Lanthorn is trodden under Foot, Darkness ensues of Course; at least, there will be less and less Discernment of Light, till at length it quite sets in the Horizon of the Soul, and Darkness gradually arises to the Meridian, with all its contrary benighting Circumstances and bewildering Qualities, to that State of Wretchedness and Woe of putting
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Darkness for Light, and Light for Darkness.—
Would we then escape the Calamity of having Eyes and not seeing with them, or shew the inestimable Value we ought to put upon Light whilst we have it, we must be sure to reverence the Law of the Lord, that shews us openly the crooked Paths, and the dirty Ways of Sin, and points out the better Road to avoid them ; that kindly lights us, itself seen, to Things unseen, eternal in the Heavens, where we all wish to be, and hope to enjoy Light and Glory, and Happiness ineffable, and without End : We must thankfully look upon it as the Favour and Deposit from Heaven put into our Hands, sacred from Abuse or Outrage of any Kind, on our Part : We should cherish and stand by the Checks of Conscience against every wilful Violation, as carefully as we preserve the Apple of the Eye God has given us to see by ; we must be aware to stand off at a Distance from presumptuous Sins, and, if we have fallen, to rise again by immediate Repentance, and desisting for the future, lest the Darkness that accompanies, should overcloud the Soul, and eclipse the Light of God's Countenance and of Duty ; and for Fear of its domineering and controuling there, to the Subversion of Principles, and Wasting of Conscience, till by Degrees the unhappy Sinner becomes a secret Apostate from Light, from God, and from Duty, though perhaps he lives, because he lives in a Christian Country, in the outward Profession of all three.
—Every Christian therefore cannot tremble too much, or be apprised too well of this his Danger in sinning wilfully and deliberately against the Light. For what Consideration can almost recover such an obstinate contumacious Offender to Repentance and Safety ? Not the Life and Immortality brought to Light by the Gospel, nor the Wrath of God revealed from Heaven against the Unrighteous
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and Impenitent, under the Curses of the Law, and the fearful Denunciations of Hereafter; not the Goodness of God leading to Repentance, nor the Presence of God standing by taking an Account of the Action; neither his Commands nor Intreaties to desist: For all these were recollected, were considered, were weighed before-hand; yet upon mature pondering the Matter, the Pleasure or Profit of Sin, which is a comparative Nothing, and but for a short Season, is preferred before the Favour of God and the Service of our Maker: And, notwithstanding the Knowledge of the Truth, the Shining of the Light, the Convictions and Dissuasions of Conscience, and the Intercession of the Spirit of Grace within him to the contrary, the self-willed Sinner ventures, in despite of every Thing: Though he sees Death and Hell not far from him, and others shipwrecked in their Iniquities before his Face; yet it arrests not his daring Progress, it alarms him not into due Apprehension of his Safety, nor quickens proper Precaution for his own Preservation. These Arguments and Preventatives were deliberated upon, and were rendered ineffectual to put a Stop to his Career: All these usual Remedies against Sin, and Means of Grace for better Conduct, were precedently applied and experienced by him; but were all baffled by his full Purpose and Resolution to transgress: What Remedy is to be tried next, or is there any other to try?—No; this Stubborness in Sin, is, as the Scripture represents, like Witchcraft; as if a Man was bewitched, fascinated, or, which is the same Thing, infatuated to his own Undoing; as if he had found out some Charms in Ruin, and was grown desperately in Love with Perdition. When ignorant and unconsidering Persons transgress, Sin rather throws itself upon them, than they upon Sin; and there is great Hopes and much Probability, when

when they arrive at Knowledge, and a better Sense of Duty, and are recovered to serious Consideration of themselves and their State, that their Recovery is at hand, and an happy Reformation will soon follow after ; at least they have neither trifled with, nor set the ordinary Remedies at Defiance. But the presuming Sinner against Knowledge and Consideration, goes out in quest of Sin, or will not move one Step out of the Way to shun it ; and when he meets it, with all the dire Train accompanying, for little or no Bribe or Temptation, invites them all home to his House, and bids them welcome. Does not this shew a Temper and Constitution of Soul abandoned to the Service of Sin and its Patron the Devil? Does not this Sort of Proceeding suppose and imply some Sort of perverse Malice against God and Goodness?—For where there is abundant Knowledge of Sin and Duty, of God and his Perfections, of *Christ* and his Propitiation for Sin, there to sin on and on, is after the Similitude of the Enemy of all Righteousness.—This you must own, so long as it lasts, is a temporary Apostacy from God and *Christ*, and the holy Spirit. But the worst of it is, it has a direct Tendency to a Denial in Principle and Profession, which is that final Apostacy, for which persisted in there is no Remission.—Thus in *Moses's* Law,* there was no Sacrifice for presumptuous Iniquity, but the Criminal was subjected to Death, and to the final Displeasure of the Almighty. The Words are these, *They that do aught presumptuously, the same reproacheth the Lord ; that Soul shall be cut off from among the People, because he hath despised the Word of the Lord and broken his Commandment ; that Soul shall utterly be cut off, his Iniquity shall be upon him.* And this is generally interpreted of A-

* Numb xv. 30, 31.

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Apostacy from the *Jewish* Religion to Idolatry, which was the highest and last Degree of Presumption in their Covenant: So under the Gospel, *Heb. x. 26.* if we sin wilfully after we have received the Knowledge of the Truth, there remaineth no more Sacrifice for Sin, but a fearful Looking-for of Judgment: And therefore if he who despised *Moses's* Law died without Mercy, of how much sorer Punishment shall he be thought worthy, who has trodden under Foot the Son of God, and hath counted the Blood of the Covenant wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy Thing, and done Despite to the Spirit of Grace: Which is evidently to be understood of Falling-off from Christianity, despising its Ordinances and its Christian Assemblies, from the Exhortation going before, which ushers in this sore Denunciation, and foretels the dreadful Consequence of not following his Apostolical Advice, *viz. not to forsake the religious assembling themselves together, as the Manner of some was.* In like Manner are we to understand *St. John 1 Eph. v. 16.* of the Sin unto Death; for which tho' he does not put the Negative, and forbid them to pray, yet he ceases positively to bid and exhort them to pray, as for ordinary Delinquents in Christian Duty; because this Apostacy was extraordinary, and quite out of the usual Methods of God for recovering to, and preserving Christian People in the Way of, Salvation; and therefore their Prayers for such were like to have very little Effect. His Way of advising in the Case of praying for some Sinners, but not so readily for others, supposes that Christians then knew what were Sins not unto Death, and what is the Sin unto Death, and who were guilty of them: And how could they know that? But as Christianity was a Covenant unto Life everlasting, brought to Light for Remission of presumptuous Sins, upon Condition of Faith in the Mediator of

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that Covenant, whose Death is the Life thereof; and as Faith in him introduces and insists upon, as it best of all animates Repentance and better Obedience, the wilful forsaking this Faith, and renouncing this Light and Life, must needs *be the Sin unto Death*, and it may easily be known by all Christians, without perplexing themselves about the Matter, to be that Sort only, and to bear that Characteristick. And it would be happy for themselves, and happy for this enlightened Age and Country, if there were not so many, as it is to be feared there are, who, from the strong and spreading Inclination to *Deism* that prevails, make nothing of the Faith of *Jesus Christ*, the Saviour of the World, counting the Blood of the Covenant (as a Covenant of Salvation, Remission of Sins, and Acceptance with God) if not as an unholy, at least as a needless and superfluous Thing. It would be very happy, and more wise, if so many did not, (whilst they profess it not openly upon worldly Accounts) privately countenance and shew a Liking to this great Sin against Light, and against their own Life.— But to those that were within, *St. John* in the aforesaid Place says, *all Unrighteousness is Sin, and there is a Sin not unto Death*; though it is of the presumptuous Kind, attended with many Aggravations; though it is the great Transgression of *David* in the Text; and notwithstanding there is exceeding great Danger of *such* presumptuous Sins getting the Dominion over the Sinner, by their treacherous Property of blind-folding him, yet it may not and will not be unto Death, if he duly applies to the Means of Grace and Life, that are in his Hands, and repents as soon as convinced that it is a Sin, and gives the Proof of such a Convict, by bringing forth Fruit meet for Repentance.—

II. There

II. There is another detestable Property attending upon presumptuous Sin, which further serves to vouch the Danger I have been speaking of, with respect to getting Dominion over the Person guilty of it, and that is the *enslaving Power* belonging to it; which either its own Artifices, or our Weakness, or both jointly concur to bestow upon it, and invest it with the most formidable Right in the World, to our own Wrong and Undoing. This is perfectly and entirely true, as well in the Nature of Things, as in the Declaration of our Lord and Master, which is ever as true as the other, when rightly understood; for he being the Lord of the Nature and Relation of Things, what he says, and what they say, is the same Thing when duly apprehended and adjusted together.—Does not he say, *Whosoever committeth Sin is the Servant of Sin*? And does not the Experience of most People, with respect to themselves, or others, agree in the Verdict, and testify the same deplorable Truth? Can any deny that he does not surely believe and know, that there are Multitudes of *Slaves* to their own Vices, even in this free Country? Where does *not* our Pity meet with Objects of this Sort, in almost all Ranks of People? I wish we do not forget that we ourselves are in *some* Rank, and may stand in need of more Liberty from Sin, from the Sin of our Complexion, than we are at present Masters of!

We very justly prize Liberty, yea value ourselves upon, and gallantly stand up for it in external Government; and thank God we enjoy it in Spirituall, and in all Temporals, in the greatest Perfection of any People this Day upon the Face of the Earth, or perhaps that ever were upon the Earth! How can we then of all People in the World endure a tyrannical Government in our own Breast? How can we so absurdly and unconstitutionally

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consent,

consent, and be Parties to the setting it up in the full Sway of controuling Power? We cannot bear the Thoughts or Suspicion of such disagreeable odious Rules in the Body Politick; yet in thy own dear Person, Sinner, thou cowardly, ignominiously sufferest Tyrants to ride over thy Head, in all the Cruelties and Vassalage of Dominion absolute; notwithstanding thou, who pretendest to know the Ends of Government so well to be the Good and Safety of the Governed, standest by like a Slave, and as a Fool lookest on, and seest all and every the Ends of Government revers'd and overturn'd by that wicked Usurper Vice, which thou hast invited in and given the Reins of Government up unto. Thy Health, which should have been taken care of, is abandoned to Diseases, and a short Race of Life. Thy Peace, which should have been preserved, is delivered over to the Storms and Tempests, Pangs and Anguish of a guilty Conscience: Thy Fortune, which might have profited and flourished amply in the Way of Godliness, goes to Wreck by ungodly Habit and intemperate Practices.—Behold the Government of thy own chusing, and bemoan thyself, presumptuous Man! For thou has still more and worse to detest in thyself, for suffering thy own Servants to domineer and play the Tyrant over thy free-born Spirit! For a Master to become a Slave to his own Servants is the most abject of Slavery, and the least pitied. And are not the Passions and Appetites given of God to Man to be his Servants, and be in Subjection to Reason for his Good? And very good Servants they are as often as they are well employed. But Sin crouches and fawns to be let in, and admitted to some Familiarity with the Affections. By Connivance of the Understanding, and the cold Refusal of the Will, it is admitted: And what is the Consequence? It basely, with insidious Arts and Shew of false Friendship, entices the
Ser-

Servant to rebel, to dispute Authority with the Master, and set up to be Lord and Governor in his Room.

Thus the three Estates of the moral Powers of a Man, *Understanding, Will, and Affections*, are all encroached upon, betrayed, and abused in their Rights by a domineering Usurper, received and encouraged by the Sinner's ownself. The Understanding loses its Discernment, and sees no Faults in the new Favourite admitted into his Bosom; the Will grows impotent in refusing the Evil; and the Affections are captivated with it; and all the Faculties are bowed down in Homage, are warped and perverted to an ignominious Compliance to a vile Favourite of our own preferring, that has no other Business with us, but to hasten our Ruin, and betray us daily into it. Thus, by an injudicious Admission, and through Defect of a timely Expulsion, Sin grows into our Complexion, and *that* Sin does so easily beset the Man at all his Avenues, and is so apt withal to keep the Possession, and not quit the Command of his Person; which it does with Ease, after it has through long Indulgence obtained its End in making a Slave of him, by deceiving him out of the true Sense of his Happiness, of his Honour, and of his Liberty.—Is this human Infirmary? No; it is human Foolishness and Perverseness, I may say Baseness: For is there not daily to be seen among Christians, a real Infirmary, and an artificial one? The first is unavoidable and pitiable, and loses not our Interest in Heaven, and the Favour of God; it supplies an Inclination to Irregularity, in sensible Enjoyments; but that manfully stemm'd and resisted, is none of our Fault, but our Honour, the Occasion of our Virtue and our Liberty; and the Conquest will be the Subject of a future Reward. Whereas artificial Infirmary is of the presumptuous Sinner's own making and modelling,

ling, he yields to let the Sin or Sins he likes, tie and bind him with a Chain, like a Gally-Slave, and helps to make the Chains himself by repeated Transgressions: He mortgages his Liberty, and too often his Fortune to the Service of his Vices; and some are such miserable infatuated Slaves, as to give up the Equity of Redemption, and sell themselves out and out to work Wickedness, and with a stupid Contentment die in its Embraces. This Infirmity, if he calls it so, I am sure, is none of *Adam* and *Eve's* Doings; he must thank himself for it, and acquit them.—*What Fruit had ye then, says the Apostle, in those Sins whereof ye are now ashamed?*—Doubtless, all Christians, every *Briton* in particular, may well be ashamed to live and die a *Slave* in this free Country.—

Thus you perceive the Danger arising out of presumptuous Sins, from its enslaving Property; and that the Bondage it delivers to is very common, oftentimes miserable, and sometimes irrecoverable.—Where then is the Remedy for those who have been taken captive, but have still some Sense and Taste for Liberty left? They must begin from the Point where the Evil first took its Rise, by presumptuously departing from the Law of the Lord, which is the perfect Law of Liberty and Freedom, and Sin being a Transgression of that Law, there must be some Loss of Liberty incurred by that Transgression. That Law gives the true Notion of the Freedom of a rational Being; yet it consists not in being free *to* Sin, but free *from* Sin: As God and all good Spirits are more or less, and still *are free indeed*. The Sinner must instantly repent of the wilful Breaches of that Law, and renew Obedience to it; considering that every Lapse into such Sin, is but piecing and mending that Chain over-again, which he wisely resolved to break, and get rid of; and that nothing that Sin can offer is worthy resigning

fighting Liberty for its Sake, or to exchange the free Dominion over himself, for the tyrannical one of Sin. Let him come, and let him listen to the Invitation of his Lord and Saviour, *Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, under the Bondage and Drudgery of Sin, and I will give you rest; ye shall find Pardon for your Sin, though it is as great as the Psalmist bewailed in our Text, and find Rest unto your Souls.*—

III. There is a further Danger of this Sort of Transgression getting the Dominion over a Man, from the *hardening* Property, that is essential to and incorporated with it. This is excellently decyphered by the Apostle, in Agreement to the Nature of Things, *Heb. iii. 13.* Exhort one another whilst it is called to-day, lest your Hearts be hardened through the Deceitfulness of Sin. The Scripture every where speaks of this hardening Quality consequent upon an Habit of Sinning. By the wise Constitution of Things there is a Law distinguishing Good and Evil, written in the Heart in Favour of Duty, which sheds a Softness and Tenderness of Mind, and for some time preserves a Sensibility and Reverence towards it; but this is corruptible and traversable, by evil Communication with the Customs and Examples of the World. This Tenderness and Sensibility of Virtue is too apt to fade and decline in this naughty World, and as that wears off, an Insensibility to Good, and Indifference to Virtue grows up in its Room; the other grows on, till a Callousness is superinduced upon the unresisting Mind. Good Institutions are accordingly infused into Youth by Way of Precaution; and whilst Sin is young, it is easy to be resisted by the Young; but when old, like a strong Man armed by Custom, or second Nature,

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it is with Difficulty surmounted. For there is a kind of impelling Force contracted by Custom, that artificial second Nature of our own fashioning, which gives a Right of Conquest in the Province of Man over the Nature that God gave to Man. If a Person has been so wise to conquer his ill Habits, by accustoming himself to contrary Goodness, his Goodness will prescribe to his Thoughts, Words, and Actions. But if Wickedness, by long Habit, has got the Upper-hand, it takes the Chair, it dictates, and gives the Law to each of them.

God, by the Nature he has given us, has made us free to chuse Virtue or Vice ; but by the posterior worse Nature, we give ourselves by Months and Years Continuance in the Iniquity of our own chusing and liking, we make a Shift to dishonour ourselves, abuse our Nature, make unjust Complaints of it, and reverse the Purpose of God for our Good. For by the Change that is superinduced from that Continuance, we emerge not the same Person at the End as we were at the Beginning of the Month, much less the same at the Year's End that we were at the Beginning of it. — For, to fall from one Wickedness to another is the natural Progress and Propensity of Sin. Sin begets Sin as a Father does a Son ; and Virtue begets Virtue as a Father does a Son : Virtue then begun and persevered in, generates Virtue, and produces a Love and Liking to it in all other Instances, tho' against the Grain ; (so great is the Excellence of Virtue, and so puissant the Power of good Custom !) Much more Sin, by its unhappy Proclivity in us, is a great deal quicker in producing the like Sin, and hatching others by Broods. We most of us know, that when presumptuous Sin is entered upon and indulged in, the Checks of Conscience against it grow weaker and weaker, and all Sorts of Admonition and Reproof loses Efficacy every Day ;
and

and that makes the Sin stronger and bolder, and readier to multiply itself every Day. — It prescribes Custom of its Side by our own Connivance, and that gives an Ease and Pleasure, and a sort of Right to the Performance, bad as it is. Custom makes Necessity; and Necessity makes Law; and Law makes Obedience ready enough, when it is upon the Side of Sin, and is a Law also of one's own making: The Blood, Humour, and Spirits all run that way, as a Channel and Direction they have been long used to. Thus the Heart is *set* in a Man to do Evil, and his Powers and Faculties are in a Canal to work Iniquity with Rapidity and Greediness. What I have been asserting is most remarkably true in the well-known Case of *Hazael*, before and after he was King of *Syria*. Before he was King, the Prophet *Elisba* foretold him, that he would arrive at that Dignity, and that he would afterwards perpetrate the most cruel and inhuman Things against *Israel*, that were ever heard of. This he resented at the Hand of the Prophet, with so much Emotion and Indignation, as to be astonished at his Expressions, and amazed at the Possibility of it, as to his own Part. — *What is thy Servant a Dog, to do this great Thing?* So great Wickedness as that? — Strange, indeed, that any Man should become a Dog to his Fellow Creature! — Yet, in Fact and History, we find this very Man, against his own Resolution and Abhorrence, become this cruel Dog to the Children of *Israel*. — And how is this to be accounted for? He slew his King and Master, and mounted himself upon his Throne: After he had once embued his Hands in innocent Blood, and, in the highest Degree of that Guilt, the Blood of his dread Sovereign; he grew so changed and altered from what he was before, that

he dreaded no Iniquity after that, and was as much or more inclined as he was before averse to execute ; and did execute those abominable Cruelties, which he so much detested, and could not bear to hear mentioned of himself, as concerned in any such Thing. So that no Man can say what he is capable of ; what Wickedness he may not perpetrate ; or where, and when he shall stop, after he has once deliberately consented to plunge himself, and dip his Conscience in the Guilt of presumptuous Sin. That sort of Transgression is so shocking at first, that the young Sinner is ashamed of himself after he has committed it ; he of Course flies to Cover and Concealment ; and, if that cannot be attained by fair and legal Means, as it never can, or ought, where the Sin is a Violation of the Rights of Society ; any the foulest or most unjust Methods are resorted to, and not stuck at, to facilitate that End : So bad becomes worse ; and what was before single, soon grows complicated, multiplies, and strives to fortify itself in Guiltiness. And this was the very Case of *David* in the Text : To be sure he did not at first intend killing *Uriah*, that faithful Servant, and useful Subject ; but after he had deliberated upon, and committed Adultery, the State of Affairs, and of his own Soul, was changed ; the Case was altered with him ; he was no longer Master of his own Resolutions, or of that Respect and Value he owed to the trusty Servant, whose Bed he had abused. The Wickedness he had committed prescribes to him, and gives the Word of Command even to a *King*, what must be done ; and so he added Sin to Sin, Murder to Adultery. And does not Murder, with us, tho' not designed at first, often follow the Instigation of Robbery ? And many other Sins, equally unjustifiable, are thought necessary, in the Opinion of

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of the Guilty, and usually do follow, besides his Design, after he has maturely consented and done any great Crime. — Such is the insidious, such is the fatal Snare of Iniquity, and the Devil, that catches the Offender by the Heel, as *Job* speaks. — Such is the false Reasoning and Sophistry of Sin in Favour of itself. — But the searing, stealing, impudent Property of it is worse; it grows upon the Conscience, and grinds it so long, till it is past feeling, and, with its many intemperate Heats and Fevers, sears it as with a hot Iron; the Sinner grows past Shame, and, from often trampling upon that, and Virtue, makes a Jest of that, and of Religion. — And the greater is the poor Sinner's Misery and Hardness of Heart, that he perceives not his Condition, tho' told of it, nor will he ever know or feel the Cords he is held with, till he makes Efforts to break loose from them by Repentance, and a new Course of Life. To that good Alteration he is, alas! by wicked Habit, grown in a Manner impotent and insensible; and it is but seldom, and with great Difficulty, that it takes Effect. This makes it resembled in Scripture to an *Ethiopian washing himself white, or a Leopard changing his Spots; so may he grow Good, who has accustomed himself to Evil.* —

But this being a proverbial Expression, and without an Eastern Proverb (a People used to conceive Things strongly, and who, to express their Conceptions, always made use of the exaggerating Stile:) According to the Tenor and Spirit of a Proverb, it implies no more, nor any Thing higher, than a great Difficulty; not a natural Impossibility.

What then is to be done, under this Difficulty, for recovering those who have unhappily hardened themselves? Two Things I would propose: One is the Consideration of God's great and various Good-

Goodness and continued Forbearance towards Sinners. This is the great Pathos and Pathetick of the Gospel ; and if any Thing in the rational persuasive Way, can soften a Man to the Sense of himself, and his abominable Doings, this Consideration is most likely to become an Alternative, and have some melting Effect upon the Principles of human Nature.— The other is, the vigilant Care of undoing and dissolving their Evil Habits by the like Methods they were contracted ; and Habits of this Kind, humanly speaking, are no otherwise to be discontinued, disengaged, and cured. To this last I have only Room at present to speak a few Things.

I ask the Question then, of every ingenuous Sinner, that is not lost to the Principles of human Action, (and I hope in God there is no such in this Place) what in Reality was the Way and Method of contracting their Habit in Sin ? Was it not, be it of what Kind it will, a daily and repeated Practice of that Sin, with a proportionable Neglect of the prescribed daily Means of Grace for preventing it ? If this is undeniably true, and none can deny it, I ask further, what did you do, when you took the Pains to arrive at that sorry Habit, whereof you had need to be ashamed ? Did you not experience in yourself, that what you did to-day, (supposing the past Time present) you did more easily to-morrow, and so on the next Day ; and for that very Reason, because you did it on to-day, and the Morrow, and the next Day. — Then you have found out the true Cause, how daily Practice and Indulgence gradually produces a Disposition towards an Habit, and fixes it, and fixes it faster, more or less moveable, according to its Progress. Does it not then follow, that you ought to have been careful, very careful, according to the Scripture Direction, of your daily walking, to have walked

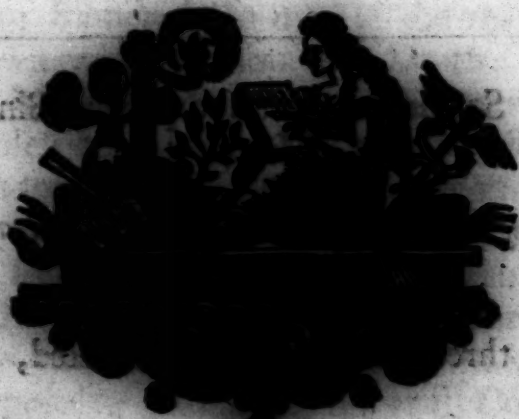
circumspectly; being strictly careful of what you did to-day, because it carries its Consequence on to to-morrow, and so on to the next Day, and on to the End of the Year; I mean that Time twelve Months?——If this is the true State of the Disease, and the Occasion of its Rise and Continuance; what else, and what other, is the natural Method of Cure, (for we are now speaking of Nature, or Habits, which are acknowledged to be second Nature) but a daily and a gradual Practice, directly contrary to the other; for daily, and for so many Days, untwisting and unravelling what the other had, Day after Day, repeatedly combined, and strongly wove into an Habit bespoke by the Owner, and publickly wore by him. Then it directly turns out in the Nature and Connection of Cause and Effect, that if the Cause ceases, the Effect will cease also. The blessed Consequence of that will be Habit on the Side of Virtue, the only Thing in the World that is wanted on its Side. Give it but that Advantage which Vice, by our own Folly, is possessed of generally, it would triumph over the World, and charm every Inhabitant of it. In order to that, give me leave to observe, (and I appeal to your own Experience likewise, if you will be so kind to yourselves to make the Experiment) That if you desist from the Vice you are addicted to to-day, you will be the more disposed to desist the next Day, and so on to the End of the Year; and for that very Reason and Efficacy, because you desisted to-day and to-morrow, and the next Day, and so forth.

And let me observe, that the very desisting from Vice is human Virtue. If you cannot desist for one Day, you cannot desist at all: But if any of you will please to forbear for one Day, you may, from that Experience, and by that very Stratagem, forbear

bear for more Days, for Months, and Years : And thus you advance circumspectly and safely, by going over the Ground back again to the Point from whence you set out wrong. And I add, that if you will be so wise to apply to the daily Means of Grace, one of which is Prayer to God, recommended to us by the Penitence of *David*, and the Precedent of the Text, your Application to-day will be more easy and joyous to-morrow, and so on to future Days and Years. By this very Conduct you gain your Point ; thus doing, and concurring, the Spirit of God will assist your Endeavours ; Sin, that treacherous, deceiving Enemy, will be subdued and kept under ; you deceive the Deceiver ; you insensibly contract an Habit of Goodness ; God is served, and your Soul saved. And in both Respects, does not this convince you of the Energy, and shew you the Necessity as well as Beauty of that Admonition of Scripture, *To-day, if you will bear the Voice, harden not your Hearts* ; which is often mentioned in Scripture ? And from what has been said, you will plainly perceive they are not Words of Course, but are certainly founded in the Nature and Reason of Things : And therefore, I hope, from hence-forward, that you will not let them pass thro' the Ear, but descend from thence, and be grafted inwardly in the Heart, to the Produce of good Living. — But, after all, Sin still keeps its Ground with very many People, notwithstanding so much Preaching and Writing, and not a few good Examples of good Living (blessed be God to the contrary.) What can be the Cause of this ? there must be some Secret at the Bottom which helps to skreen the Sinner's Conscience, disable all Invitations and Discourses for his *present* Repentance. This I take to be that prodigious Folly and Fallacy of the Grounds that presumptuous Sin runs its Course

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Course upon. And what is that, generally speaking, but a Presumption upon the Goodness of God, to pardon them when they please to sue for it? It may therefore be very proper to take this Argument out of the Sinner's Mouth, and turn it against himself, and shew him the inhuman Disingenuity of abusing the Argument deducible, as well as the Goodness of God, from the Principle which is purposely made known for leading Men to Repentance. But this, as it is of great Import, may deserve another Discourse.



S E R.

S E R M O N

The Fifth.

The true Force of the Argument of Goodness. The inhuman Disingenuity and destructive Fallacy of abusing it.

A Fourth Sermon on presumptuous Sins, from
R O M. xi. 4.

Not knowing that the Goodness of God leadeth thee to Repentance.

IN my three last Discourses I stated,

- I. The true Nature of Sins of Infirmity; the Consistency of them with the Terms of the Gospel, and our Hopes of Heaven.
- II. The Nature, Degrees, and Guilt of presumptuous Sins, as distinguished from the other.
- III. The fatal Danger of their getting the Dominion over us from three essential Properties accompanying such sort of Sins.

And whereas the Consideration of the Goodness of God is most likely, in the Nature of Things,
to

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to infuse some Softness into the Heart of Man, and is designed of God to be a powerful Remedy against the last mentioned *hardening* Property of Sin, which deceives and destroys so many Sinners, by leading and inducing them to forsake Sin: Nevertheless, amongst other presumptuous Sins, the Sinner is very apt, partly from the Deceitfulness of his own Heart, with respect to future Resolutions for better living, partly from the Deceitfulness of Sin itself, and his present Love of it, to presume also too much upon this noble Remedy, by mis-timing and postponing the the Efficacy of it. This is the prodigious Folly and Fallacy which I mentioned of the Grounds whereon presumptuous Sin runs its Course. This is the subtillest of all the Deceit; this is the strongest of all the strong Holds of Sin.—For no presuming Sinner is so mad at the maddest as to drink down certain Poison and Death, in a sedate Purpose of swallowing it, though never so palatable, unless he was sure of having by him an effectual Antidote to preserve him safe from the deadly Effects. No Sinner can be conceived so desperately foolish, as, to intend incurring the dire Threatenings of future Punishment due to Sin, at the Time that he was taking his Fill in Sin; but fully purposes to avoid those future ill Consequences. God, say they, is long-suffering, full of Compassion and Mercy, infinite in Goodness to forgive Iniquity, Transgression, and Sin. Hence it is that the Instant the Sinner resolves to continue in Sin, the same Instant he takes a Resolution of repenting some time hereafter; and in the mean time presumptuously draws great Sums upon God's long-suffering and forgiving Goodness, sufficient to answer all the Occasions and Designs he has for Sin. And so he thinks in the Imagination of his Heart, that it will be even as well with him, when he has repented (and that by the Grace of God he fully

intends) as if he had never sinned. Thus he freely runs the Course of his Iniquity, pleased with himself in the Dexterity of his Contrivance how to reap the Pleasure or Profit of Sin, and make sure of Happiness hereafter; and as long as he judges himself safe in his Project, of both enjoying what he proposed from the Evil of his Doings, and escaping withal its Inconveniencies in a future State, he applauds himself for being wise both for the Flesh and the Spirit, if he sins and repents: Why then should he baulk any agreeable Temptation, having such a Refuge and Retreat, as the Arms of God's Mercy, always open to receive him, when he shall return and repent?—Thus he proceeds and encourages himself, not in the Style of the *Epicurean* Deist, *Let us eat and drink for To-morrow we die*, which denies any Use at all of the Gospel; but in the Phrase of the wrong-headed bad-hearted Christian making his Boast of it, *Let us sin that Grace may abound*; which, whilst it admits, presumptuously trifles with, and wickedly frustrates the whole Design of the Gospel.

Now in order to rescue the Goodness of God from this horrible Abuse, and in Hopes of recovering and disabusing the presumptuous Transgressor from the terriblest of all Cheats he puts upon himself; I would, if you please, proceed upon my former Design, and take this Argument of God's Goodness out of the Sinner's Mouth, perverted as it is to his Destruction, and turn it upon himself for his Preservation. By,

- I. Representing the Force and true Consequence of it as laid down in Scripture, for affecting Men's Hearts, and changing their Lives.
- II. The inhuman Disingenuity, and destructive Fallacy, in abusing this divine Argument, and resisting the gracious Intentions of it.

With

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With respect to the first Head, it is plain from the Words before us, that the declared Design of God's long-suffering Goodness is to lead Men to Repentance. *St. Peter* 2 Epist. iii. 15. resumes the pathetic Doctrine, inculcates the same Conclusion, and refers to this Place of *St. Paul*; *Account*, says he, that the *Long-suffering of our Lord is Salvation, even as our beloved Brother Paul also, according to the Wisdom given to him, hath written unto you.* And in the ninth Verse preceding, *the Lord is long-suffering to usward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to Repentance.* This is the direct Inference God points out, and the express Effect he ordains to follow from the Consideration of this salutary Truth, and would have that most endearing Attribute of his Nature, which has hitherto undeservedly preserved him, and stood between Sin and its Wages, the Sinner and Destruction, ingrafted inwardly in his Heart, for bringing forth effectual Repentance and Reformation. Whoever therefore does not improve it to this beneficial Use, but perverts it to a Purpose quite contrary, neither knows the Goodness of God, nor considers its Design, as they ought to be known and considered by every reflecting Creature, but is miserably and scandalously false to Reason, to Revelation, to God, and himself.—If we would be more particularly sensible of the genuine Force, the most engaging Power, the most mighty Tenderness, and the all-convincing Strength of that gracious, that affectionate, that best Argument, where can we view it better, than in the Representations of holy Writ; wherein we may be sure it is truly delineated, and it is no less true that we find it so by Experience, if you will allow God to be the best Judge, wherein his own Glory and Greatness is most displayed before Men, for attracting their Attention to him. You will find

in the 33d and 34th Chapters of *Exodus*, when he would make his whole Glory to pass before his Servant *Moses*, he caused it to be proclaimed, *The Lord, the Lord God merciful and gracious, long-suffering and abundant in Goodness and Truth, keeping Mercy for Thousands, forgiving Iniquity, Transgression, and Sin, and that will by no Means clear the Guilty.* It is true, he mentions his Justice as the Punisher of those under his Government, who will not be reclaimed by such Profusions of Goodness and Varieties of Mercies; yet it is plain he delights most to dwell upon the other Characteristick, and most conspicuous Prospect of himself; that all the World may know, who know any thing of his Revelation, that Mercy is the prevailing Inclination of his Nature, and its favourite Exercise, which he is most intent to glorify, and set forth before the Children of Men. And this Display of it is so refulgent, that he accounted of it to *Moses* as equivalent to a personal Interview with himself, when his adoring Curiosity carried him to ask of him to see his Face (an inaccessible Sight in this Life). The Answer with the Promise was, *He should see his back Parts*; and this very Proclamation was the Performance of that Promise. For Knowledge, *a posteriori* for Instance, is sufficient to constitute a moral Demonstration, or, in other Words, the experimental Knowledge of the Effects, the good Works, and Benefits of God (which may in this Life present be stiled his *back Parts*) as clearly lead up to the Knowledge of the Cause, and the Certainty and Glory of his Face, as it must be absurd, and one would think impossible, for a rational Creature to live and subsist upon the Gift, and not recognize the Donor. And in that Sort of Knowledge of him which considers his Gifts and Graces more than any curious useless Theory of him, he would have us satiate our Understandings. — And that Branch of the compassionate Goodness of

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of God, which we are now considering, is particularly spread forth and propounded in Scripture to the lowest Capacity of Understanding, to the Deaf, to the Sleepers, to the Passengers, to the Ignorant, to those that are in Error, and to all Sinners, that they may all attend, repent, and be wise.

In what Variety of endearing Assurances does he describe himself averse to punish us; extremely prone to pardon upon, and most excessively desirous of, our Repentance; as being slow to Anger, not extreme to mark what we do amiss; delays Chastisement, and when we reduce him to that, punishes less than we deserve, and in the Midst of Wrath thinks upon Mercy; delights not himself in our Punishment, when it is final and indispensable by the Laws of his Government; but strives to prevent it by all imaginable Concern for our Retreat to Happiness; and that he may be clear when he is judged in the Case, avers that he made not Death, neither hath he Pleasure in the Destruction of the Living, but Men pull down Destruction upon themselves with the Works of their own Hands. *Oh that there were such an Heart in them, that they were wise, that they would consider this, this one Thing! Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die? How shall I give thee up Ephraim, how shall I deliver thee Israel, mine Heart is turned with me, my Repentings are kindled together?* Nay more tender and constant is he in Affection, than the Love of the tenderest Mother to her own Infant; *Can a Woman forget her own sucking Child, that she shou'd not have Compassion on the Son of her Womb? Yea they may forget, yet will I not forget thee**. In the Pitifulness of his great Mercy he defends, as we find in some Places of Scripture, Multitudes of miserable Sinners, from the consuming Power of the Adversary. In some, he

* *Isa. xlix 15.*

takes from them some Opportunities of Sinning : In many, he proffers all proper Means and Helps for his Return. In others he receives him kindly upon Repentance, goes out to meet him more than half Way upon his Return. And not in one Place, but every where, he certifies our erring and straying Condition, how abundant he is to wipe out Transgressions, though of the deepest Dye. He would appear like one that does not keep his Word in his Threatenings, rather than not receive the returning Sinner to Favour. He renews his Invitations, and not only renews but pursues those with ardent Entreaties to be Friends with him, who provoke him to his Face ; so patient is he Day by Day, tho' we provoke him every Day.—To be so strangely good to the Disobedient and Unthankful, when our Happiness is not, cannot possibly be any Manner of Addition to his, is that glorious God-like Strife of overcoming our Evil with his Good, which amazes all Men, whilst it conquers some!—He is Debtor to none of us in Mercy ; no, on the contrary, we are all Defaulters and Debtors to his Justice.—And was he not more concerned for the Sinner's Recovery than he is for himself, by giving him more Time to consider better, and reflect more with himself what Misery he persists to chuse, and what Felicity he continues to refuse, we should, alas ! long ago have forfeited the one, and been plunged in the other.

And to make all this effectual, he so loved the World, lying in Wickedness, as to send his only begotten Son to die a Propitiation on Earth, and be a Mediator in Heaven, for every repenting and reforming Sinner over the Face of the Earth, and to become the Instructor of and Example to all who are acquainted with his Revelation. But as I have elsewhere amply treated of *this* most affecting, *this* infinite Goodness and Wisdom of God, I return
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to observe to you, how God brings himself in, speaking by the Prophet how he hearkened and heard. What did he hear by hearkening? It follows, He heard them speak not aright; they repented them not of their Wickedness, saying, *What have I done?* He listens, as it were, and makes his Remarks.—Sure, says he, it cannot be long before some will relent of their Obstinacy, and bring Joy into my holy Courts: I wait long for some Token of penitent Sorrow, some contrite Sigh from the Heart, for having basely abused the Invitations and Tenders of my Patience so long: I beseech them to be reconciled, as if I had been the first Offender, and actually was their Inferior; I solicit and am unwearied with soliciting, as if I was to be the only Gainer by their Compliance; though their Compliance is only to consent to a sure Advancement of their own Interest and Happiness every Way, upon Terms very feasible, and under a Yoke light and easy. I have winked at repeated past Incogitancy and multiplied Ingratitude. For I sustain the unworthy Life that affronts me, and the profane Breath that speaks ill of my Name, What Numbers have I rescued, in every Country, from envioning Perils? How many in almost every Parish have I restored to Health from dangerous Sickness, being unwilling to take them at the Disadvantage of an unfinished and imperfect Repentance? I cut off others every Month in the Year in the Presence of all Men, often by sudden Death, oftentimes those that are younger than they, that some might become an effectual Warning to others. I gave them Yesterday, and many a good Day of Life, to reflect upon these Things, and suffer the Influence of multiplied Forbearances to take Effect upon them, though they misused Yesterday, and all their Life long, in the Ways of their Provocation, Lo! I have presented them

with this Day moreover, desirous to make them one Offer more (notwithstanding Justice urged as a Matter of Right to have awarded their incurred Perdition Yesterday); surely therefore this People will hear my Voice To-day, and not rebel any more against a Goodness which is known to them this Day, and acknowledged by them also, to be very earnest and sincere to save their Life from Destruction, and crown them with Loving-kindness! Doubtless they are that persuadable People I made them and have some Remains of that Reason I lighted up in them for their Good, and will shew some Token of it for the same, in beginning this very Day, whilst it is called To-day, in thinking better of my Long-suffering, comparing it with their own perverse Folly and profound Danger. I swear by their own Safety, and by all the Justice in the World, it was high Time they had begun sooner.—Nevertheless, I hold out the Scepter of Peace To-day, and promise Forgiveness, and will love them freely, with this Proviso, seeing they have trifled so insufferably with me, and for so long a Space, that they account of it as the last Day I offer to begin their Change: And that I will be taken at my Word this peremptory Day, and will promise no more Morrows: That they therefore instantly turn to me, and make no longer Tarrying than the very next Hour after they leave this Place, to take up the Confession of the returning Sinner upon their Knees, *Father I have sinned against Heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy Son?* Then will I indeed be their God and their loving Father; yea, I will run to meet them as a lost prodigal Son, receive and comfort them, kill the fatted Calf, put the Ring upon their Finger, and entertain them with Favour and great Rejoicings: For shall an earthly Father joy for the Return of a prodigal Child; or a
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Shepherd for a lost Sheep, or a Woman for finding a Piece of lost Money; and not the King of Heaven, in his superior Generosity, rejoice much more for the Recovery of a disobedient Subject whom he loved? Shall not God rejoice for the Return of a Sinner? *Verily I say unto you, there is Joy in Heaven, before the Angels, over one Sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety-nine just Persons that needed no Repentance.*—

Such, you perceive, are the Instances of some of the most obliging Ways and Methods, which the God of all Goodness puts in Practice to recover Sinners from themselves and their Obstinacy, and reclaim them from the Ways of Misery, and compel and provoke them, as it were, in Spight of themselves, to be Good and Happy, by the various Powers of so many Varieties of the divine Goodness and Long-suffering, adapted to affect and bring in all the persuadable Tempers that are to be found among the Sons of Men.—— And after the Condescension of his Goodness has been at so much Cost and Pains, and Patience, he may well appeal to the Sinner's Conscience, What could have been done more for that Vineyard of his, that he has not already done? Ah, foolish and unwise, do ye thus requite the Lord, and his Patience? Do you go thus on to shew your deplorable Obstinacy to be as infinite as his adorable Goodness; as perverse and disingenuous as that is benign and healing; and as scandalous as the other is glorious?— But what is all this Spurning at the Kindnesses of Heaven, but a direct Cruelty to yourselves, and a daily Gradation to your own Ruin; as it is a constant Provocation to shut up that Loving-Kindness in Displeasure, and give you over as incurable?— Nothing with-holds the good Things God designs you, but your present Attachment to Sin.—— Is Sin then, whose miscalled Pleasure is but for a Season,

son, better than God's Favour; than Life itself, which is certainly everlasting; than Heaven above, whose Joys are professedly endless and ineffable? And do you resolve to expire in its Embraces, before ye will think of parting, and become a Martyr for Vanity, Imposture, and Lyes? — *How long ye simple ones will ye love Simplicity?* Consider this, O Men! Let these weighty Persuasions, and affectionate Efforts of heavenly Goodness, penetrate your Ears; and let him that hath Ears open a Passage, and him that hath an Heart to understand, understand so well, as to make haste and prolong not the Time to keep God's Commandments. — Oh that the Words of *Wisdom*, (ch. xvi. 11.) were accomplished upon all Hearers of this salutary Doctrine. *They were pricked, that they should remember thy Words O God, and were quickly saved; that not falling into deep Forgetfulness, they might be continually mindful of his Goodness!* I proceed to the next Thing, which was,

II. To represent, on the other Hand, the inhuman Disingenuity, and destructive Fallacy of abusing this most divine Argument, and resisting the free Grace and saving Intentions of it.

Upon so vast an Argument as this, the Time obliges me to confine myself within the Compass of a few Thoughts. Indeed, the whole Project of such rich Goodness and prolonged Forbearance of God, was only to gain the greater Authority to his Laws, to ingratiate himself more and more into Mens Attentions and Affections, that they might not so much as find in their Heart to break them; but consent the more surely to be led in the right Way to the End of Man, by the true Cords of Man, the soft Cords of Love, and strong Bindings of Gratitude. For this Reason, he gives and continues

all

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all sort of affectionate Proofs, that he might be sure to possess our Minds with the highest Resentment of Gratitude, and the most ingenuous Fear of offending so great and superlative a Friend, and be the more addicted to keep his Testimonies, and observe his Laws.

Of all the Motives and Persuasions of the human Mind, as long as there are any Remains of Sensibility, Freedom, and Ingenuity left, that of Gratitude for past, and Interest with respect to future Benefits and Kindness, have the most captivating Power and constraining Influence; and, as the Word of God is replete with both these, it carries with it the Efficacy of a two-edged Sword for piercing the inward Parts; and is enough to make our Hearts burn within us, as it talks to us of these Things, whilst it kindles in the Breast such pleasing Ferment and Emotion.— To hold out then, when the double Entreaties of both these address themselves, is to hold out when all Reason of withstanding is taken far away, and every Excuse, or Shadow of Excuse is removed.—Whilst God importunes us with such an ardent Affection, as in a Manner to take no Denial, and so long strives to vanquish our Stubbornness with his Gentleness, our evil Doings with his continual good Things, we must be strange degenerate Creatures, if we can have the Conscience still to oppose so many Charms, and go on resisting a Stream of Endearments! To take Shelter therefore under God's Mercy only to affront his Majesty, is like the ungrateful Viper, or deaf Adder, full of Sullenness and Poison, which has the Baseness and Brutishness to sting the Bosom that cherishes it.—O the barbarous Ingratitude of the Generation of Vipers and Sinners! to strike at him that protects us, and insult the Kindness which preserves us; to fortify ourselves the more in Contumacy

mary and Gainsaying, from that very Gentleness and Indulgence which amicably labours to subdue us ; to propose Enmity and Ill-will, because he is resolved, by all possible Ways, to be our Friend and Saviour ; to think that a good Reason to repeat Insolence against him, because he doubles his Kindness, and prolongs his gracious Overtures to be reconciled ; and resolve not to become better till he grows worse to us, compelling him by Repetition of Disobedience to do what is against his Inclination, even to alter his Unwillingness to punish into a Necessity of doing it ? *Are not my Ways equal, are not your Ways unequal ? Are they not disingenuous to the last Degree ?*——What strange Perverseness, what inhuman Wretchedness is this ? 'Tis like abusing the Judge that gets us a Reprieve of Life ; or flying in the Face of the Father that sustains us, or wresting the Scepter out of the King's Hand to throw it in his Face, whilst he is holding it out in pure Token of Forgiveness and Friendship.——To make that the Addition which was designed to be the Diminution of Sin, and fix it the faster from what was intended to remove it ; to advance upon the Signal of Retreat ; and assume Courage and Effrontery from what should make us blush ; and draw Connivance out of the most effectual Reprehension ; and instead of retracting, grows only the more obdurate ; is acting diametrically opposite to the natural Influence, to the whole scriptural End and Aim of God's Goodness, Patience, and Forbearance. A Return this, as monstrous and preposterous on our Part, as if he should ask us a Cup of Water, and we should give him a Coal of Fire !——To see the most generous Remedy against Sin become the very Occasion of committing and continuing in it ; and Men go on to sin the more, that Grace may the more abound ; and from the reclaiming Argument of God's Goodness,

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to draw an Inference to Disobedience, in lieu of Repentance; and continue in Lies, because he is Truth, and persevere in Darknes, because he is Light, and in Despite of his Light: surely, O God, this is thwarting all the Principles thou hast invested us with! Certainly, O Man, this is a brutish Contumely against thy Reason, as well as against thy God, and an horrid Abuse of this his Goodness towards thee! This is a rude Repulse, to be expected from no Creature but that which the Scripture compares it to, Swine, such Swine as were the Companions of the Prodigal whilst he was lost and impenitent. — Especially whilst we Men know, and can no ways deny, that the King of Heaven condescends to become a Suppliant to us Worms; whilst he importunes us with Entreaty, backs every Address with Kindness, with daily and hourly Presents; only and solely that he might be the more enabled, with our own Consent, to prevent our Unhappiness here and hereafter. — He interrogates with an Earnestness, as if his own Happiness depended upon it; desires to know of us what Course he should take to save us. — Can we bear, can we possibly endure to see, and see daily, his Pain and Trouble to save us, and at the same Time look on our own Backwardness against it: He so mindful and forward, we so cool and indifferent at the Loss of our Being: He so kind to suspend, we so industrious to pull down his Vengeance, and hardly so much as to give him leave to spare us. — I say, therefore, to go on still to abuse so prodigious a Patience, and unspeakable Love towards us; to dare his Justice, and irritate his Power to destroy us; and, seeing he does not actually destroy us, speedily and vigorously sin the more; because Sentence against Evil-doers is not executed speedily, therefore the Heart of the Sons of Men is fully

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set in them to do Evil, is so very horrible a Perverseness and Misbehaviour in a rational Soul, as can admit of no Name but that of the Madness of Inconsideration. — God never importuned for any Thing besides; all Things else throughout the Universe, put upon the Trial, yield to his Rule, and acknowledge his Dominion; when he then so importunately beseeches us to be reconciled to him and our Duty, to mind the Things that make for our Peace, to lay down our vain Opposition against him, which can injure none but ourselves; not to be sensible of so many Endearments of his Love, to turn our Backs upon his most earnest Entreaties, and cast them all behind us, deserves to be called by any name, rather than that of Christian, of Man, of Reason, or a Pretence to Reason. — Who can Name a Disposition in the World worse than that, which will not be won by Kindness, nor hearken to its own Interest, nor soften a little, nor receive some Impression from the continual Distillation of Benefits? In what Country was it born? and who are its Relations? The Scripture tells you, they are the Offspring of the nether Mill-Stone, must own the Rock for their Father, and the Stone for their Brother. And who is able, from Flesh and Blood turn'd into *these Stones* by hardy Wickedness, and obdurate Continuance in presumptuous Iniquity, to raise up Children unto *Abraham*? Not Man, but God: Man cannot, and God perhaps will not. —

Which leads me to say something of the destructive Fallacy of the Grounds, whereon presumptuous Sin runs its Course. To reckon up all the Fallacies of Sin would be the same Thing as to count the Hairs that grow upon the Sinners Head. — In few Words, presumptuous Sin is the falsest, the greatest, and most ruinous Impostor in the World. — Let Hatred, therefore, have its proper Object.
Now,

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Now, there is nothing that a Man hates more in this World than to be cheated and imposed upon ; because it argues a Defect in his Understanding, that he did not find it out. In this just Abhorrence of Imposture, you take laudable Care to bear a fair Character for your Honesty, and maintain a clear Disposition not to cheat any one of your Neighbours. Wherefore then so thoughtless and wretchedly careless, as not to be honest also to yourself ? Why pick yourself out of all the World, to be an Enemy to, and put the Cheat upon, which is the worst and most ridiculous of all Cheats, as well as the strangest of all Enmities ? — Whilst you presume upon Sin, you presume upon God's Goodness to forgive it, which is so celebrated in the Scripture.-- Do not you yet perceive that you put a Trick upon yourself at the first setting out ? Look into your Bible, if you can find Pardon and Reconciliation promised to the presumptuous Sinner. No ; it is no where to be found. They are there, exclusively of all others, promised only to the *penitent* Sinner. But the presumptuous Sinner and the penitent Sinner are two Persons : And may, too likely, (as I formerly observed from some of the deceitful Properties of Sin) never be the same Person. Sin and Repentance are two contrary States ; therefore it must be a palpable, as well as fatal Fallacy, to make the same Thing a Motive to two Contraries. — Therefore, to sin on and on, because you may repent, whilst it is so many to one against you that you do not repent, is effectually to juggle yourself out of the Consolation of that great Article of Faith, The Remission of Sin. It is little else than offering to make a Changling of the immutable God, soon angry and soon pleased, weak and soft to the last Degree. — And to sin, that Grace may abound, is offering moreover to pass the Cheat upon our Saviour and Redeemer ; wickedly presuming

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suming to make him the Minister and Promoter of thy Sin, who purposely came to lessen and put a Stop to it. — How can you, self-deluding Man, lift up your Eyes to Heaven, so long as you make and constitute the Patience of God to be the Patron of Sin, and Encourager of Disobedience, which is intended to be the Cure thereof? — God is as necessarily a Governor as he is God; he must therefore be as necessarily just as he is good: Think then of his governing Justice, and of his Right and Resolution of punishing the Refractory and Disobedient, and the Delusion of such Transgression will appear in its proper frightful Colours. Consider them both together, as they are seated both together upon the heavenly Throne, and the Collusion of false Division and wrong Thinking will be removed: From thinking on Justice *singly*, there arises the Fallacy and Error of Despair; on Goodness *singly*, there springs up that daring Peril and Deceit of Presumption which so much more abounds: But reflect on them as what they really are, inseparably united together, and each of those ruinous Impositions will be banished from the Breast, and kept at a proper Distance. — Nay, think but aright of his Goodness, that he is more worthy to be feared upon that very Account, and not to be abused and dallied with, the Snare that you formed from Forbearance will be broken, and you will be delivered. For his Goodness and Mercy is full as great an Adversary (tho' of a different Sort) to Sin and Perverseness, as his Justice: Whilst this acts upon the slavish abandoned Part of human Nature, the other is proposed to have its Effect upon the free, rational, generous Constitution that is given to us; and therefore, as Love engaged commands all the Passions, it orders Fear to stand more affectionately in Awe of him who is most loving of and indulgent to us: According to that of
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the *Psalmist*, *There is Forgiveness with thee, that thou mightest be feared.*— This is the Case of Father and Son. And let it be considered, that the best Father in the World may be provoked to give up an incorrigible Son, and another Mist and Fallacy that Sin throws over the Mind from *Paternal Goodness* will appear ; and it will appear, moreover, that you must first awaken out of the Opiates of Sin, and come to yourself from the Fallacies and Infatuations of evil Courses, as the Prodigal did ; and that you must return with him, and that you must with him confess your former Profligateness, before God will be any more your Father. —And if you must undo and confess your Presumption upon God's Goodness, as well as your other presumptuous Crimes, what do you get by it, but to be convinced of another Cheat and Design that Sin had against your Life, and the happy Condition you might have enjoyed under your Father's Roof ? Be it again reflected on, that in case you do not repent, an Event that is extremely hazardous, what follows, but as it is in the Verses after the Text, *After thy hard and impenitent Heart thou treasurest up Wrath against the Day of Wrath.* If all you have been doing, is only so much the more to encrease your Punishment, as you have encreased in Sin and Presumption ; there starts up under that Cover, and stares you in the Face, the most hideous Prospect of Ruin, as well as the most aggravating Falshood and Perfidy of Iniquity. — Let us alter the Case, if you please, to the more favourable Side.---Suppose you should repent some time hereafter ; Have you not lost Time since you were Master of your own Actions in the rational incumbent Duty of encreasing in Habits of Virtue ? And by so much the more have you not diminished the Reward hereafter, which you might have been entitled to ? Seeing Future Rewards are commensurate to Degrees in Virtue in this Stage of

Probation, has not your Delay increased your Work of Salvation, lessened your Inclination to begin it, and your Ability to go through it? Behold the Snares of Sin encompassing you by Clusters, and lying in wait for your Destruction!——But the most destructive and deplorable Fallacy of all is, lest God should be provoked by continual Obstinacy, to give the Sinner up to a *reprobate Mind*; then he is lost to all Conviction, and any Capacity of being undeceived. God's Word has assured us, that he will not always strive with the Stubborn and Rebellious; that there is a Time when he will shew himself froward to them that walk frowardly; that he will laugh at their Calamity, who laugh at his affectionate Warnings and Entreaties, who set at naught his Counsels, and would have none of his Reproofs; that he will, in his Turn, despise those and their Cries, who go on, in the same Verse of the Text, to despise the Riches of his Goodness, Forbearance, or Long-Suffering. Such is the terrible Consequence of not considering, and not being led by the Goodness of God to a timely Repentance.——Every Body is sensible of their Folly some time or other; but it is with this Difference, the wise Man perceives it in Time, alters his Conduct, and avoids the ill Consequences that were overtaking him, but the Fool and perverse Sinner is sensible only when it is too late. God hath certainly waited long enough already to vanquish into Compliance every Son of Reason that is born of a Woman, and hath but a short Time to live. And, if every one would lay his Hand upon his Heart, and ask the Question there, whether he has not indeed deserved, from the Number of his Provocations, and the Duration of his Obstinacy, to be forsaken and given up of God as incorrigible; the true Answer certainly is, with Fear and Trembling; with that Fear and Trembling which is appointed to

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to work out our Salvation with, God has certainly given the present Opportunity for that Purpose; he owes no Man any other, nor can any one promise himself any Future: But if any one will still go on in the Perverseness of his Iniquity, and add Sin to Sin, (which God of his Mercy avert,) I plainly see them hardening their Hearts, God giving them up, and all After-Thought of Salvation, *ipso facto*, beginning to forsake them. But if they will close with the present Call to-day, whilst it is called to-day, I dare assure them they have not yet sinned past all Opportunity of Grace and Amendment: Forasmuch as they are yet in Health, and full Liberty to make sincere, hopeful, saving Resolutions, and keep them. You are not now (thank God) upon a sick Bed, like to die, which of Course produces abortive, or at least very suspicious Resolves. The Crisis therefore of your Salvation, rests upon closing with this very Day's Invitation. ---- And whoso is wise will ponder these Things, and they will understand the Loving-kindness of the Lord. They can never understand and consider it too much. The Consideration will induce them, will in a Manner constrain them to love God; and then, if they love him, they will certainly keep his Commandments.





S E R M O N

The Sixth.

The Discretion Men shew for this World, a familiar Direction for attaining Heaven : And a Reproach for not employing it to that End.

The First Sermon on L U K E xvi. 8.

For the Children of this World are in their Generation wiser than the Children of Light.

BEFORE we enter into the principal Purpose of our Text, it may be convenient to premise a few Things by Way of Explanation and Introduction, remitting the Parable at large to your own Reading over, from the Beginning of this Chapter to the Words under Consideration, which are the Moral of the Parable, the weighty and important Reflection our blessed Lord makes upon it. Whereas it is said in the Verse of the Text, *the Lord commended the unjust Steward*, it is to be observed, 1. That the Words are not in any Means to be so applied, as to recommend the underhand dishonest Practices of this Steward. You perceive, it in the very Narration, implicitly branded and disapproved, under

under the Character and Appellation of an *unjust* Steward : To recommend any Injustice, that be far from God and his Christ. But the Point in our Saviour's View, to which he would draw our Attention, is the prudent Management, the Diligence, the Forecast, so eminently observable in the Children of this World in making Provision and Accommodation for their Generation, *i. e.* their present Life, their Being, their All, ('as they count) and for the better compassing those Aims and Ends. It is an Injury to any Parable, to solicit it farther than it had a Design to speak : Whenever we do so unkindly by it, as to stretch it in paralleling Things farther than the Similitude was intended, it says nothing to the Purpose. All the Business the present Parable has with us, is to engage the Children of Light to an Observation of the industrious and provident Conduct which the Generality of the Men of this World are so dexterous at, for attaining their earthly Ends and Purposes ; and that the Generality of Christians might henceforwards be quickened, by Way of Shame, into much greater Diligence and Circumspection for attaining their better Hopes, their high and heavenly Aims, the End of their Being, the most glorious of all Ends. The Comparison runs not, whether the proposed Ends of the Children of this World, or those of the Children of Light, are best, and most wisely fixed ; but which of the two Agents, after they have deliberately chosen their respective Ends, and made Profession of them, do prosecute them, in their Generation, their Way and Management, by the wisest Methods, and likeliest Means of accomplishing them. And if we take up the Parable with this Aspect, how just and true are the Words of the Text. And what a Shame and Reproach is it to Christians, that they, who have such inestimable Treasures, such transcending Views and Fel-

cities before their professed Hope, and most assured Faith, should yet be found (for the most Part) less concerned and considerate, less provident and active in pursuing them to Possession, than are the Children of this World in Pursuit of their little Advantages, low Projects for Trifles, for Shadows, and for Moments. That these latter should however use all Manner of prudential Ways, omit no sort of Application or Industry, to secure their Object; who sees not that this is a Piece of Wisdom in which they outstrip the other? Whether they are wise or not in pitching upon such Ends, is not the Question; but the Thing settled by the divine Resolve in the Text is, that they prosecute them fitly and wisely, with an effectual Sagacity, and determined Resolution, not to miss and fall short of what they set their Heart upon: And, that this is to their Praise, and bespeaks them Actors consistent with themselves. To see, on the other Hand, the Children of Light so tardy and remiss, (a few only excepted) in their Endeavours after their great and glorious Interest, as to make no Conscience of counting it no Imprudence to fall short in their Thoughts and Cares about it; so improvident and uncircumspect in an Affair that almost only, but to be sure, of all Things previously and particularly, deserves our Thoughts and Care; and shew so little Wisdom in the Managery of what calls for the choicest, the earliest, and most earnest Application of our Powers. Is it not (Christian People) an unworthy Remissness; is it not a degenerate and pernicious Slackness? Does not, therefore, this emphatical Folly, this strange Inconsistence, and abounding Improvidence, deserve to be straitway amended? For of this shameful Error and Misconduct do we now stand corrected in these Words of our Saviour; as many of us as
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profess ourselves his Disciples, and would pass for Christians.

Therefore, *secondly*, let it be briefly premised, that the Phrase *Children* is here employed in Relation to their Portion of Inheritance : The Children of this World are they, who have their Portion, and place their Happiness, in it ; contented to grow up to no other Inheritance, thinking of no other Settlement or Fruition, nor desiring any other State of Things ; and, if they make some Shew of Religion outwardly, their Heart is far from it ; it is only to carry on their worldly Aims and secular Interests the better. The Children of Light are the opposite to these, professing themselves Strangers where the others are at home ; being Children of the Gospel, they are Children of Light, in the Perfections of its last Revelation from Heaven ; making a contented Shift with present Accommodations, they place their Happiness, and look for their Inheritance in a future and better Country ; a certain invisible World has their Hearts, and they lay up their Interest in the Immortality and Eternity which awaits them. Into these Helps and Discoveries we are all initiated at Baptism, and profess to give up ourselves to the Renunciation of the former, and to the Credence and Expectance of the latter ; and, if we believe our own Profession, and desire those Things in Earnest, {we are indeed wise. But so it is, most-an-end, that the Children of this World are far wiser, more expert and sedulous, than the other, in applying all fit and proper Means, and in such a vigorous Manner, as both promises them Success in their Ends, and commonly gains it to them.

Be it therefore, *thirdly*, reflected on, that Wisdom in the scriptural Sense and Usage of the Word, is of a complex Idea, made up of Knowledge, and

its best Use and Application to Practice. Principally and ofteneft this latter Knowledge is an Acquaintance both with the End to be purfued, and the right Means of purfuing it ; and whenever the Means are fuitably and effectually applied, then, and not before, it becomes Wisdom, and bears that Denomination. All the numerous Characters and Passages in Scripture that I can think of about Wisdom or Folly, have an Aspect to this specifick Notation ; when the End or the Means is not known, it is filed Ignorance, in Oppofition to Knowledge ; but when they are known, and are fit to be, but are not, applied, Knowledge changes into Folly. When Wisdom ftands abfolutely, then it implies both the beft End, and the beft Means : Thus the Fear of God, and keeping his Commands, being the fure and certain Way to our fupreme End, is called by that goodly Name ; and, perhaps, I fpeak it with all Reverence, why Chrift is called the Wisdom of God, is for applying the only proper Means for Man's redemption and Salvation. When Wisdom is exprefs'd with an Addition, then it fignifies no more than a Sagacity in ufing the fitteft Means, whether the End be good, or whether it be bad : Thus in the Text, *the Children of this World are wifer than the Children of Light*, i. e. they are more fhrewd and intent, more ftudious and thoughtful, in confulting, and more pertinacious in applying the apteft Means and Meafures, Ways and Methods, for bringing their Ends to pafs. And now we are entering upon the main Doctrine, and going to hear the chief Lesson which our Lord would have us learn from thefe Words, viz. That we make a fpiritual Improvement of worldly Wisdom, imitate and learn to manage our heavenly Interelt, and profecute our fpiritual Concerns, with the like wife Providence, as worldly
Men

Men do their earthly Aims and Purposes. Our Saviour kindly and most familiarly puts us in a Way of obtaining Heaven, if we would but employ the same Rules and Measures of Procedure as we are daily versed in for worldly Affairs; he appeals, as it were, to the Manual of Directions in our own Hands for the managing of Business, and shews that we could never miss of Heaven, if we made but a *Business* of it. All the Beasts in the Field have Skill and Capacity, Will and Industry, to compass the Things that Instinct directs them to: Our Instinct, as Man, our Profession, as Christians, is Immortality; we have Skill, we have Wisdom and Direction, even to a Degree of Cunning and Shrewdness: And what pity is it, that we should be wise in every Thing, but where we should be most so? Or so mis-spend our Policy and Prudence, as not to direct them to the best Things, the main Chance? The same Carefulness, and good Management, which we abuse, by confining and devoting wholly to little Things, and thereby traduce our own Understanding of Folly, rightly directed, would procure us (and without interfering too with any Thing of Reputation, Comfort, or Service to us in this World) the richest Treasure, the highest Honour, and divinest Pleasure; the same Rules and Pains, I say, which we observe, to get almost nothing present, and, in the End, everlasting Perdition, might become blessed Instruments (and who would not think they should be so in the Hands of wise Men?) of gaining Heaven and everlasting Happiness, if we would use them to that Purpose: They shall compass us both Worlds, at one and the same Time. — This I am about to recommend to your Consideration, by borrowing so much from your Rules of Business and daily Conduct, as to shew their Application and Efficacy in the noblest Things. This is only to be done by shewing
several

several Steps and Measures of ordinary worldly Prudence, which are imitable by us, and transferable to our spiritual and principal Affair. In order to this, Wisdom and Prudence, as they are the *recta ratio agibilium, rerum expetendarum, fugiendarumque scientia*, may be divided into these two general Parts and Offices :

- I. A Consultation ; then a Resolve ; and next an Application of the Means to the End.
- II. A Guard against the Consequences that may happen ; and Foresight of all probable Hindrances, Dangers, and Difficulties.

Whoever attends to, and secures these two Parts of his Affair, whatever he aims at, humanly speaking, secures his End, and gains his Point : And under these two Branches may most of the Rules of Practice in holy Scripture, which concern our general Calling as Christians, be reduced.

First, Of the first general Head.

This is one Point of Wisdom which the Children of this World customarily shew forth, that when they have fixed upon an End, and are professed in the Prosecution of it, they study to acquaint themselves with the best Means, and what are the aptest Methods, the shortest directest Ways, and most approved and experienced Measures of facilitating their Purpose. They consult and advise with Books and Persons that can give them any Insight and Information : And, whenever they are wrong, are glad to be corrected, and set right again : They love, and value those that assist them in their Designs upon the World : They listen with Pleasure, and hold him to be a dear Man, that would communicate to them a Project of certain Advantage, and shew them a certain infallible Way of securing it : They are contented to be bound seven

ven Years Apprenticeship, to get a thorough Understanding of the particular Parts and Assortments, of the Myſteries and Difficulties, the Knack and Slight of the Occupation they give themſelves up to ; and think the Time and Money all well laid out : Thus all Arts and Sciences, Trades and Professions, though they center in earthly Things, and aim only at providing Bread for this preſent, Life are ſtudied and thought worthy to be accurately known, that they may become Artiſts in their Way, and grow eminent in their Profeſſion. This Conduct of theirs is very fit to be tranſcribed into the Care and Obſervation of the Children of Light ; for without a competent Share of this Knowledge, they will ſtill be but Children of Darkneſs. Better unborn than untaught. They muſt walk in the Paths of Chriſtianity, as the Blind walk, they know not whether, ſtumbling and falling ; living to Chriſt, to the Glory of God by Chance, and acting without Rule. Knowledge is as much the Light of the Soul, as the Eye is of the Body ; but of all Knowledge, this is the neareſt a-kin to us, and both moſt imports us, and importunes us moſt, to be conſtant in. If we profeſs ourſelves Chriſtians, then we are alſo bound to it, to get a ſufficient Inſight, what is the Affair, the Covenant, and Engagement of a Chriſtian ; as ſuch, where are his Directions, and what are his Privileges, his Scope, and Obligations. For every one muſt needs be aſhamed know little or nothing of that he makes a Profeſſion, and he ought to be as much aſhamed to pin his Faith on another Man's Sleeve. This is the Science of Life ; this is the Affair of an immortal Spirit : All other Knowledge in the Abſence of this is Darkneſs or Ignorance, Impertinence or Amuſement. And, if it beſt deſerves our Pains, and the Attention of our Mind to attain it, it may well, as it does

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expresly, require it at our Hands, and provoke us by all Means throughout the Volume of the Book to an Acquaintance with such a Guide ; the most true and best of all Friends to us in all Conditions of Life ; it charges and invites to add to our Virtue Knowledge ; to be understanding what the Will of the Lord is ; to be fitted with all Knowledge, to the full Assurance of Understanding. We are obliged to prove all Things, in order to know, and hold fast that which is best : We are told, that the Excellency of Knowledge is, that Wisdom giveth Life ; that it exceedeth Folly as much as Light Darknes. How passionately does holy *David* pray for it ; and his Son *Solomon*, from its Worth, how does he stimulate all Learners, to seek for it as Silver, or search for it as hid Treasure ? Then shall we understand that the Merchandize thereof is better than that of Silver, or of fine Gold. And the Author of *Wisdom* asserts (ch. viii. 3, &c.) *That she is conversant with God ; she magnifieth her Nobility ; yea the Lord of all Things himself loved her ; for she is privy to the Mysteries of the Knowledge of God, and a Lover of his Works.* If Riches, therefore, is to be desired in this Life, what is richer than Wisdom, that worketh all Things.

A second subsequent Province of worldly Wisdom, is, after it has searched out and deliberated of the Means, to take up a vigorous, effective Resolution to put them in Practice. *I am resolved what I will do*, says our unjust Steward, against I am turned out of my Stewardship ; and so said, so done with him. The Children of this World are firm and stedfast to their Project ; they are intire in their Purpose of succeeding ; they waver not in their Resolution, but are one with themselves, undivided, and undistracted what to do, and which Way to take ; they collect all the Force of their
Mind

Mind to what they are about, and pursue it with all their Heart, with all their Soul, with all their Strength ; they keep the Scope they have taken steady in View, and make all Things bend and become devoted to bring it to pass ; and in this View they govern their Actions, direct their Way, and animate their Steps, as certainly as a Man upon an Expedition to a Place sets out, goes straight on, and makes the best of his Road, let Wind and Weather do their worst. But for the Children of Light, it is not so with them : How many of them spend their whole Life in deliberating how to live, and not coming to a Resolution, whether they shall finally cleave to this World, or to God, till Death surprise them in the Hesitation ? How many more set out with faint half Purposes, and, in Consequence of the same, turn aside out of the Way they should walk in ? They waver and fluctuate hither and thither, from this to that ; looking one Way and rowing another, for want of the steady Compass of Resolution to steer by ; they sail up and down, and are tossed too and fro, troubled at their own Inconstancy, and are at their Wits End, by reason of their irresolute Life.—It is very necessary, therefore, that they should copy after the other, and learn to be as firm and inflexible, as true and constant to their noble Resolves, as the other are to their terrene paultry ones. Was Heaven as much in our settled Purpose, and we in as good earnest resolved upon the Acquisition of it, as of an earthly Advantage, we should succeed with an infinitely greater Certainty than in the other. For, in worldly Proposals, whatever we may promise ourselves, and reckon upon as certain, after the best concerted Methods, and utmost Pains-taking, there is no one Thing eventually certain ; the Providence of God may, and does stop Proceedings, and intercepts the Battle from the Strong,
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the Race from the Swift, Favour from Men of Skill, and Bread from Men of Understanding; Disappointments very wholesome for bringing us to the Knowledge of ourselves, and of him that governs us; of him that purposely intended to awaken us to shape our Course after, and place our Confidence in better Things: Things that are ours; and for which we were constituted, which there cannot possibly be a Disappointment, if we are true to the Means, and faithful Performers of the Terms upon which they are to be had: Help yourself in that, and God will be your never-failing Helper. Let yours be the Care, and the Care will be succeeded as sure as in he is Heaven. And it is not worth while to be regular and steady to such an Interest, and to square all our Actions from the Determination of such a glorious End? But till we are first determined in our Minds for it, we do nothing in order to it. *Est aliquid quo tendis, & in quod dirigis arcum:* Without setting up a Mark we shoot at Rovers; live *extempore*, as those who have not Thought nor Design, are mere Flutterers and Wanderers, every Thing and Nothing. But we might easily redress this destructive Double-mindedness of ours, by taking a Course with ourselves, to be only as resolute and well-determined for Happiness unquestionable, as the other for their worthless Ends; and so bent also on the Means, as to copy after the Pattern of the *Psalmist*, and every one say to his Soul, *I have sworn, and stedfastly purposed to keep thy righteous Judgments.* And in this Mind we shall do well, in the

Third and next Place, to enquire into the next consequent Piece of Wisdom, very obvious in those who negotiate for this World; and what other is that, but as soon as they have resolved upon the Means; to proceed to Execution, set all Instruments and

and Hands to effect the Business? — And in this, their Care and Conduct are remarkable, and worthy our Imitation in these following Instances.

First, They make use of no Means and Methods that are inconsistent with their Designs.

Secondly, They apply them with all Speed.

Thirdly, With all Diligence of Labour.

Fourthly, With all Perseverance of Constancy.

Fifthly, They ply all subordinate Means.

Sixthly, They are wont to use a Moderation between Fear and Assurance.

Seventhly, and lastly, They retrieve Mistakes, and rectify Slips and Misadventures.

These Qualities and Dispositions (beside what I am to speak to under the second general Head) attend upon all wise Acting for an End, and conspicuously go along in the Train of all wise Management for this World.

First, They ordinarily make use of no Means or Methods that are inconsistent with their Designs. If they have an House to build, they do not use Straw, Stubble, or Hay, to rear up the Fabrick, and become the Rafter of it; neither do they build and lay a Foundation upon yielding Sand, but firm Ground and solid Bottom. They put not new Cloth into an old Garment, in case of Clothing; and if Corn is to be sown, they break up the Ground, and prepare the Soil for it: If they are bound to take a Journey Southward, they set not out Northward, nor go a great Way about, nor ever hope to get to the End of it by sitting still, doing nothing, but gravely resolving upon it; they make use of their Discretion, and shew they have it, by adapting fitting Materials, likely Courses, the shortest Cut, and readiest Way to their desired End. But herein, how defective, generally speaking, are the Children of Light? In the House they are building for Heaven, they lay a Stress on those Things

Things that have no Strefs in them, and make their Cement of untempered Mortar, that is ready to fall in Pieces of itself : Neither take they good Heed of the Foundation ; for many Times that is so sandy as not to abide the Trial, or bear up any Building against the Gusts of Storms, which are necessary to be provided for, and to be expected, as well as good Weather. And in the Habit of their Profession, what Patch-work is there to be seen ; one Part disgracing the other, not becoming the Gospel of Christ ? That which should be their Ornament, they neglect, and that which should be their Shame, they not unfrequently glory in as a Fashion ; as negligent of some Virtues, as if they were to be damned by them, and as greedy of Vice, as if it would save their Souls, and bring them Peace at the last. They see this in one another, and can reproach and traduce for it, however they are agreed to overlook it in themselves. In sowing Seed also for the Harvest of eternal Life, they hope to reap where they have not sown, and gather plentifully where they sowed sparingly ; and for want of Industry, Culture, and Tillage, it is a common Sight to see them commit their Soul, and venture their Salvation upon that they would not hazard a Crop of Corn on. If we view them in the Journey they say they are upon ; if we should meet them upon the Road of Life, and ask them whither they are travelling, they would say, without doubt, for Heaven. Strange Folly and Presumption, after a few Days, so indifferently at least, if not ill spent, upon Earth, to hope hereafter for Heaven ! I know not what is greater Sottishness, to take so little Care of their Salvation, or to think that so little will do. In their spiritual Travail they seek to themselves perverse Ways, and delight in crooked Paths ; leave the strait plain Road, and look out for By-Ways, going about I know not whither,

whither, till they grow bewildered in fallacious Footsteps, and lose themselves in devious Tracks. But what moves Pity most of all, is to see great Numbers contenting their Souls with resolving very religiously for their Journey's End, but never moving a Step towards it; nor are they ever like to do, since they defer it so constantly, and refuge themselves in good Wishes and Intentions *hereafter*, at the same Time that they are so perfectly convinced of the Folly of it; for did they ever, or can they ever eat or drink, walk, ride, or do the least Business, by only resolving upon doing it. This is so perfectly ridiculous, that they know all such Wishes and Resolves to be equivalent to not wishing or resolving at all. For by such Resolves they never yet imposed upon themselves in any the smallest Trifle, but only in the Affair of Salvation, which one would gather from such Proceedings, was with them the veriest Trifle of all. In any other Matter it would be inexcusable to the last Degree, imprudent, stupid, and sottish: But with how many Christians are the most incompetent, improbable, I was going to say impossible Means, thought sufficient enough to save their Souls? Wherefore then do not they see their Folly, and learn to begin at the right End, and quit the Courses that are destructive of their Designs, and incompatible with their Hopes, and become more uniform with themselves, and of a Piece with their Pretences, and reform this ruinous Mistake from the greater Prudence and Consistency, Order and Regularity, they cannot but observe in worldly Agents, and know right well themselves how to put in Practice in such Affairs? I know not what Cunning may do for accomplishing worldly Attainments; but this I know, that to rely on Shifts and Fallacies for our desired Success in Heaven, is an infallible Way to fail

fail of it. We may, if we please, cheat the World, cheat ourselves, perish and be undone; but we cannot put a Trick upon God, or alter any thing of the Standard of those Terms he offers Salvation upon. *But if thou wilt enter into Life, keep the Commandments,* for without Holiness, be our Resolves and Professions what they will, no Man shall see the Lord.

2dly, After they have investigated the several Means, and sorted out what are most expedient, and rejected what are inconsistent to their Purpose; they begin the Work with all convenient Speed, comforting themselves, *That a Work well begun is half done.* Thus the unjust Steward, as soon as he had cast about what he should do, loses no Time in pursuing it. And the Children of this World in general are mighty ingenious in chusing and watching the Seasons; they weigh the Circumstances of Time and Place, and know how to value an Opportunity; they well enough pursue that golden Rule of Business, Not to defer that till To-morrow, which they can do To-day: They know Delays to be dangerous, and that to be Men of Dispatch is a Title of Praise: If they have a Voyage to take, they watch the first Wind and Tide that favours them; if they have Seed to sow, they know the Season for it; they know full well that if they let it slip, it is to no Purpose to sow; if there is not Time enough for Increase after it is cast into the Ground, there can be no good Corn nor Harvest looked for. If they have a particular Day's Journey to take, do you ever know them stay till just the Night of that Day before they set out. In these Things they fulfil the Character in *Ecclesiastes viii. 5. A wise Man's Heart discerns both of Times and of Judgment.* But the Children of Light, tho' they are commanded to *walk circumspectly, not as Fools, but wise, redeeming the Time,* transact their immortal Affair most

most preposterously and unaccountably. They let their Opportunities pass unheeded, whilst the former lie in wait, and let slip no Season of making their Fortune: If a Market rises, how busy are they to send to it, and come in for a Share of the Advantage; and how inquisitive are they where a Commodity is most wanted; and in all other Seasons and Hits of Advantage, are always and equally vigilant: But these regardless Creatures let Things lie at Sixes and Sevens, pass over Opportunities that court them, neglect Repentance, with all the Seasons of Duty; in short, they neglect nothing but what they should least have neglected: One thinks he can never be too soon and timely; the other saunters, postpones, and delays, as if he could never be late enough. We slumber and dream over our Time and Advantages. If we did the like in any other Affair, we should certainly be the first that would call ourselves Fools for our Pains. Why then do not we take them for an Example of Haste and Expedition, and rectify a Blunder that is like to be our Ruin? Why do not we take Advice of our own Reason, and copy out our own Practice in other Things, and yield not only our Ear, but our Hearts, to what the Scripture says, *Work out your Salvation with Fear and Trembling*, lest we fall short of having Time enough to effect it; and not endure it in ourselves any longer to loiter and trifle in a Thing we can never be too serious about, or make too much Haste to be secure of. We know very well, in Affairs and Debates of Consequence, when clogged with Clauses, they are as good as frustrated: So we may be as sure we are doing the same Thing by the Resolution for Repentance, if when God commands us to repent To-day, we presume upon an Amendment to his Laws, and say we will repent Tomorrow. *Behold now is the accepted Time, now is the*

Day of Salvation. Hearken to his Voice therefore To-day, whilst it is called To-Day, lest any of you be hardened through the Deceitfulness of Sin. Work whilst it is Day, before the Night cometh, when no Man can work. Taking the Psalmist for our Precedent, who had been a grievous Sinner, but repented, made Haste, and prolonged not the Time to keep God's Commandments.

The other five Maxims of Conduct, together with the second General Head, must be reserved for the Subjects of future Discourses.





S E R M O N

The Seventh.

*Several Maxims of worldly Wisdom
in Business spiritually improved.*

The Second Sermon on L U K E xvi. 8.

*For the Children of this World are in their Generation
wiser than the Children of Light.*

IN my last Discourse on these Words, after having premised three general Remarks, for the better fixing the genuine Design of the Parable to which they belong, and for opening the true Meaning of these Words in particular, as they are the chief Key to it ; that we might benefit ourselves from this excellent Piece of Self-Instruction, and be advised to consider and use better our own Skill and Advantages ; and do our Understandings that Justice, and ourselves that manly Service, as to lay out, and employ that Wisdom and Prudence, Contrivance and Application, as well upon the confessedly greater Things of a Life to come, as the Generality of us so excellently do, for ordering well those worldly Affairs which we all know to import us infinitely less than the other ; that so by entering upon that holy Management, we may come to free ourselves of the Reproach of

acting otherwise, and enjoy the Consolation and Applause of true Wisdom laid out to our best Interest, nay, to all our Ends and Purposes, even for the compassing both Worlds, at one and the same Time.—In order to this, I say, you remember it was by me supposed for the Ground of improving under the Reprehension of this Text, that we are expert enough for worldly Affairs; Masters of the Art of our several Businesses; wise to project those Advantages, wise to pursue them, quickly, resolutely, industriously, and consistently; and no less cautious to provide against what may fall out. If in these Things we are Men, appearing unto all Men to have abundant Sense and Reason, and with that Reason to be self-conscious of a Sublimity of Mind for better Things; then do we stand instructed by Rules and Measures of Conduct most familiar to us, and known by us to Perfection, how to begin, continue, and end the Work of Salvation. And seeing nothing is wanting on God's Part that we might be better acquainted with our own Powers, and reminded of the noble Use of the several Instruments in our Hands for effecting the most excellent of all Things; it was necessary that I should lay down the several Steps and Measures of ordinary worldly Prudence, imitable by us in our eternal Affairs. To this Purpose, you know I distinguished Wisdom and Prudence, which are the *recta ratio agibilium*, into these two general Parts and Offices.

- I. A Consultation; then a Resolve; and then an actual Application of the Means to the proposed End.
- II. A Guard and Caution necessary to be constituted for the Removal of Impediments; and a Foresight of, and Provision against whatever may probably happen,

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Under the first of these, we considered our usual Methods of Procedure when we fix upon a worldly End. As first, how we study and acquaint ourselves with the best Means, the shortest and directest Measures of Dispatch, with all other proper collateral Methods of the particular Business; without some competent Knowledge whereof the best Intention in the World can effect nothing, but all will be Confusion, Blunder, or Chance. 2dly, when duly informed of the successful Ways and Means, how presently we become firmly resolved to pursue them. And thirdly, as the Consequence of that Resolution, how we set all Instruments and Hands to Work to effect the Business. And under this Province of Wisdom, which belongs to the Application of Means, I took notice to you of the remarkable Care and Conduct of the Children of this World, surpassing the Children of Light, and very worthy of our Imitation in these following Instances.

First, They generally make use of no Means or Methods that are inconsistent with their Designs.

Secondly, They apply them with all Speed.

Thirdly, With all Diligence of Labour.

Fourthly, With all Perseverance of Constancy.

Fifthly, They address themselves to all subordinate Means.

Sixthly, They are wont to use a Moderation between Hope and Fear.

Seventhly, and *lastly*, They retrieve Mistakes, and rectify Slips and Misadventures.

Having gone thro' the two former of these Particulars, I now resume my Thread of Discourse, and proceed to the

Third Imitable Instance of their Prudence, which shews itself in pursuing Undertakings with all Diligence of Labour. The Children of this

World do not think it sufficient to resolve on a Thing ; but to set their Shoulders, and bend all their Might and Main to accomplish it ; they proceed with Vigour, like those that are intent upon what they are about ; they are well pleased therein to shew themselves Men of Application ; and both praise that Saying, and receive Praises for it. What Fatigue will they not undergo, what Ease and Pleasure not deny themselves, for gaining their Ends ? Their Life is too short for finishing their Projects ; and so is almost every Day of it, for perfecting their daily Proposals : They late take Rest, and even then their Heads are at Work upon the Pillow, and their Mind at hard Labour in forecasting, when the Body is in the Posture of resting ; so restless are they always. They think, they act, they move like Men that are alive, when employed about them. But turn to the Children of Light, and you will perceive them (bating only a few) to be, as it were, not themselves, but another Species of Men, in the very Function and Capacity wherein they ought particularly to resemble the other. Tho' they have furnished themselves with Knowledge of the true Means, and with a Resolution of carrying on their heavenly Concern ; yet, in the Prosecution, who so cold and remiss as they. There are none faint and indifferent, like unto them : They run in their Race at the Rate of Cripples, as those who *halted between two Opinions*, whether God or *Be-lial* should be their Lord : *They fight the good Fight* as Cowards and Runaways ; they transact their eternal Affair like People that do not care for what they are about, or did not know whether they had best do it or not ; or, as if their Mind was upon something else, all the while : So listless in their Endeavours, and so sparing of their Pains, that the Work is often in Suspence, and in Danger of going backward daily. One seems but to act, the other

other acts in downright earnest. But how inglorious is it in the Children of Light, not to be as much in earnest for their immortal Concerns? And therefore how absolutely needful to copy after the Measure and Manner of the others attentive Industry, that we may also learn to give an *Air* of *Business* to the Cares of our Salvation, and thenceforward have the better Grounds to promise ourselves Success? Were all the Maxims of Diligence for growing rich, and aspiring to Honour, transplanted once into Religion, we should equal the primitive Christians, and strangely surpass ourselves; immediately dismissing our present Laziness and Indifference, in a Matter of such infinite Consequence. For, if the Courtier would be as punctual to pay his Addresses to, and as sedulous to be well in the Graces of his God, by doing the Things that are well pleasing in *his* Sight, that he cannot be out of, as he is mindful to place himself in Sight, and do that which is agreeable in the short-sighted Observation of his earthly Sovereign; what immense Honours would fall to his Share, and without a Rival too? Or, if the Trader would set a just Price on his Soul, above other Goods, what inestimable Riches would flow to him upon the Foot of his Accounts? Or, did the Countryman make a Farm of his Soul, (according to the Direction of the Prophet *Hosea*, ch. x. ver. 12. *Sow to themselves in Righteousness, reap Mercy, break up their Fallow Ground, for it is Time to seek the Lord,*) what a prodigious Increase might be reaped, without any Cost, or without the least Hazard? In short, did we all, in our several Stations, suffer the Rules of our heavenly Calling to have their Influence on us, in the same Scope wherein they oblige us in holy Scripture to give Diligence *to make our Calling and Election sure; to be fervent in Spirit, serving the*
Lord,

Lord, with Abundance more to the same Purpose ; were we but as much convinced of the Necessity of Labour and Diligence in one Case, as we are in the other, we might be absolutely sure of having a precious and immortal Crown in one Case ; whereas in the other, we often have nothing but our Labour for our Pains. Then might we (Oh why do we not, when we can so easily !) pleasure our heavenly Master, who meant to have it so, in beholding the Children of Light, in this Respect, as wise in their Way, as the Children of this World in theirs.

But *fourthly*, There is another Point of Management, akin to the foregoing, in which one mightily out-strips the other ; *i. e.* Worldly Men pursue their Aim with all Perseverance and Constancy : They give no Respite to their Thoughts, but know how to carry on their Purpose with persevering Cares, till they bring it to Issue. They know full well, that Remissness is fatal to any worthy Enterprize. When did you see them ever stop short, and drop a Project that was in their Power to compass, and was essentially necessary for them to succeed in ? How chearfully do they submit to Inconveniences ; encounter Dangers in their Way ; and if there arise Difficulties never so hard, what else do they serve to, but to whet their Vigour the more, and raise their Appetite to Success the higher ? *Win it and wear it*, is their gallant Resolve, and the Terms they submit to with all Alacrity ; or, according to the Motto of a noble Family, *Aut nunquam tentes, aut perfice*. And the Persuasion that actuates and enlivens all, is, that Labour is the settled Price by which they must hope to gain all Things excellent. — But behold now, on the other Hand, what a Difference there is in the Actings of the Children of Light : They are
soon

soon apt to be weary of Well-doing, daunted, discouraged, and diverted out of the Way, and are affrighted almost at the Shadow of a Hardship or Danger : They proceed by Fits and Starts, and bewray a Levity and Caprice of Mind ; striving so faintly to keep *on*, as if they did not much care if they were *off* again. But how easy is it for us to mend our Pace, to quicken our drooping Endeavours, and regulate our Inconstancy, by taking the other for a Pattern of Steadiness, and Perseverance ? For how essential indeed is it, that we be courageous, and perfect in that, as they are perfect ; since we can have no Hopes without it ; since we are bound down to the same Things by Rules and Maxims that came from above, as ever we trust one Day, *that our Labour may not be in vain in the Lord ; to be steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in his Work ; to continue in the Paths of our Duty with all Perseverance ; to ask, seek, knock ; Words, that in the very Tenour and Contexture of them would put us into Motion, and necessitate us to a Sedulity and Continuance in Prayer, and in every Act of Well-doing, if we would either receive, or hope to find any Blessing ; or have any Door open to our Desires of entering into Life!*

If the Offender among Men never ceases his Suit for Pardon and Mercy, as long as they are attainable by Entreaty, and by performing certain Conditions ; why does not the Offender against God learn to be like him, not to desist his fervent Prayers, and Endeavours of better Obedience towards a forgiving Father in Christ, who both delights to be overcome with Importunity, and, what is more, to meet the returning Sinner half Way with Embraces ?

If a Child of this World is not affected with the Shame of Singularity ; nor thinks it any Hindrance to growing Rich, but rather uses it as a Spur, if he
could

could be *singularly* so ; wherefore is the Child of Light so poorly daunted from his undoubted Virtue for fear of being thought *singular* ? Does every Child of this World know of a Surety, by a perpetual and universal Experience, that Practice in any sort of Art manual, or mental, or other Undertaking whatsoever, soon subdues the Discouragements and seeming Uneasinesses that are therein ; and that nothing is too difficult for a willing Mind ? why then, in all Justice, does not every Child of Light practise in his glorious Undertaking upon the same Certainty and Encouragement ? Wherefore, at the first Entrance, is he dismayed at Difficulties which are sure to change into Facility and Delight, upon his faithful Perseverance ? Again, if it is the daily Interest and Practice of the first, to think every Day of his worldly Affairs, and revolve them in his Mind, and keep them in his View ; whence is it, that the latter are so unlike, in deeming it enough for his superior Purposes, to think once a Week upon them, and even then, too much like one that has little or no serious Thought or Concern about the Matter ? 'Tis true, if one Fault and Transgression was amended in a Week, and not wilfully repeated, all would be amended in Time ; and if they would please to improve by the others excellent Art, and, like them, think daily how they shall make a Progress in the high and important Business upon their Hands, a mighty Progress would be made indeed. If one flinches at no Weather, sticks at no Roads to come and make his Markets, to buy and sell, and get Gains ; why should the same ever be Objections to the other, in his Way to that Place, and on that Day, which are sacred to the Advantages of his Soul ?

There is a *fifth* Instance of Prudence, wherein the Children of this World clearly outdo the Children of Light, viz. in plying all subordinate Means for

for perfecting their Purposes, and bringing their Ends to pass. And one cannot but admire at their Dexterity and Readiness, in referring every Thing that occurs to the Affair carrying on. Whatever Accident happens, they turn it presently to the Account of that. As the Circumstances of human Action are always varying, and shifting the Scene, whatever arises and presents itself, if it has any Relation of Advantage to their Design, these Men presently spy it, and as instantly embrace the Occasion, and seize it: They cherish every Thing that makes for it, pressing every Occurrence into the Service, that can be of any Use. On the other Hand, if it has no favourable Aspect, but threatens to cross, or seems to affect it with Damage or Molestation, how immediately do they resolve to decline, and have nothing to do with it? For, 'tis their Way, whatever happens, and as soon as any Alteration springs up, to have their Eye immediately upon their Design, and summon their Mind and all their Powers to council about it; and, upon the first Examination, deal by it as it deserves; treating it either with a good or bad Opinion; Regard or Disregard; Love or Hatred; Praise or Defamation; according as it is conducive or injurious, of Credit or disrepute, Help or Hindrance, for or against their Purpose. And is it not the Glory of all true Prudence to make these Respects and Differences, and thus dispense its Favour and Discouragement, Dislike and Avoidance? For here is its Province and OEconomy seen to distinguish itself, *Præsentia ordinat, præterita recordat, futura prævidet*; i. e. it orders and manages all Things *present*; it records *past* Events; and provides for the best against what may come to pass for the *Future*. As to the first Branch, of making the best of Things present, embracing what is advantageous, and shunning what is otherwise, the
Men

Men we are speaking of, are very sensible and sagacious, and shew a wonderful Presence of Mind. Almost all Men can play, without learning the Tables of the Changes and Chances of this World, and make the best of the Throw without Discomposure, taking nothing to be contrary to their Expectations, which was in the Possibility of the Chances : If it is not as much to their Advantage as they would have it, still they convert it to the Security of their Points, which are the Hinges the Success of their Business must turn upon : They judiciously enough remark all Occurrences, and observe every Thing as it has Bearings to the Point in Hand. All the News the Children of this World hear, whether of Loss or Advantage, the Scarcity or Plenty of any Commodity, the Disgrace, the Death, or the Rise of any Person known to them ; the first Impression it strikes is, what they in particular are like to be the better, or worse for it : If the former is apprehended, the Sound no sooner reaches the Ear, but the Heart rises up to meet it with a Welcome ; if the latter, it as soon gives the Distaste ; and this do they by Virtue of Custom, as naturally as a Man throws out his Hands to save himself from falling. Now all this Prudence is very imitable, and would prove admirably serviceable to the Children of Light, in the Conduct of their blessed Business, and they might easily rival the other in their Successes ; if they would also be as prompt and present to their eternal Interest, as to refer all Things that fall out, through the Changes and Chances of this mortal Life, to the Safety and Furtherance of the same. Is it any Sort of Adversity, for Instance? To think how really conducive is that to their eternal Welfare ; contented to be made wiser by it, though it does not make them richer. Or is it any Sort of Prosperity? how it may and ought to be managed by Way of laying up

up a Foundation for the Time to come, through the Good thereby done unto others. Whatever Motion, Affair, Overture, Advice, or Company, recommends itself to our Conversation, to cast our Eye in the first Place upon that great Concern ; and first consider which Way it affects that, and accordingly frame a Resolution to reject, or embrace, being determined to entertain nothing that is prejudicial to it, and cannot be made otherwise ; and likewise every thing (however otherwise agreeable) that is inconsistent with that divine Hope ; ever remembering of two Evils to chuse the least, and of two Goods to prefer the greatest ; and rather lose a right Hand or Eye, than the Life of the Body ; or the short Life of the Body, rather than the Life of the Soul for-ever : Preferring to be perfectly happy for Ages without End, to being imperfectly pleased and gratified for the few Moments of a fugitive Life. For are either momentary Benefits or Sufferings to be accounted of in respect to what is eternal ? How unspeakably small are they ? But one Degree above nothing in the Comparison. Ought not therefore the future Good and Evil in the next Life, in virtue of that Consideration, to be always in the Scale, not as future, but rather as present to the Soul, seeing these last will one Day be gone, and the other present, and none can tell how soon, who considers the Uncertainty of Life. By this easy Remembrance, and familiar Art of spiritualizing Things, and making References and Annotations on what passes towards our heavenly Purpose, nothing would be indifferent, nothing unconsecrated, and undevoted to serve and advance it ; and so should we fulfil the Direction from Heaven, *Whether we eat or drink, or whatever we do, to do all to the Glory of God ; to the Name and Honour of Christ ; walking circumspectly, not as Fools, but as wise, redeeming the Time : And receive both the*
Applause

Applause and Safety which the wise Man * inscribes to this Prudence. *Discretion shall preserve thee, and Understanding shall keep thee, to deliver thee from the Way of the evil Man, from the Man that speaketh froward Things: It shall instruct thee to walk in thy Way safely, and thy Foot shall not stumble.* Then shall we have our Eyes where the royal Preacher puts us in mind they should be used, when he says, *†The wise Man's Eyes are in his Head, i. e. to make Observations all around him, to descry what is, and what is not of Use and Concern to us; what least or most assists, or spoils our grand Affair; implying withal, that he that does not put his Eyes to this Use, may as well pluck them out, and cast them from him.*

A second Case of plying subordinate Means, is the calling in Help and Assistance together with Counsel and Advice. And here I must necessarily urge the Children of Light to be imitative of the other. It is a good Maxim indeed of Business, *not to do that by another which you can do by yourself:* It is safe enough so far as it goes, and prevents giving others needless Trouble; but nobody was ever self-sufficient for *all* Occasions; many will and must recur, wherein it would be certain Miscarriage not to be beholden for Help, not to invite in Assistance. If the Children of this World are observed then to be very solicitous to make Friends; get an Interest with every body whose Service and good Offices are necessary to their Affair; to consult the Opinion of others in Difficulties emerging; to seek to be reconciled even to an Enemy, when they cannot bring it to bear without him; to love all People like Friends, like themselves, who are Promoters of what they call *their* Interest; if one Tool will not do to try another; to drive the

* Prov. ii. 11. iii. 23.

† Eccles. ii. 11.

Nail that will go, and rather provide superfluous than scanty Assistance, with the common Subtlety of having two Strings to their Bow. If they, I say, are seen to importune all Aids, and leave no Means unassayed for compleating their Design; Is not here a fair Copy of good Management laid before the Christian to transcribe? Nay, it is so continually in his Sight, he cannot well look off it. Why then is he the last to follow the other's Measures? Is it not good, is it not necessary for the Attainment of his better Aims and Hopes, to trace them Step by Step? By striving to make an Interest in our God, without whom we can do nothing; an omnipotent Friend, who can back us with that Force that nothing can worst; by imploring his Succour, and importuning his Assistance; in taking Advice of his holy Word, and those that are skilled in it, in our spiritual Difficulties; in being reconciled to our Enemies; when our Interest in Heaven lies at Stake, and cannot be brought to be accepted in Account, without a true Forgiveness and Love of them. Why do not we endeavour, like the others, to have no Enemies? But if that is impossible, with all the Prudence in the World (especially now-a-days) then to take Occasion from them, who seek Occasion against us. Why again are we so slow and cold in well affecting, and making much of those who advance our spiritual and our best Interest of all? Why so much our own Foes to account them our Enemies for telling us the Truth, the very same conspicuous Truth that God has told us, and would have impressed and inculcated over and over upon us by their Means?

Lastly, Do you desire here two Strings to your Bow, then take unto you Faith and good Works: I would advise you not to part them, but consolidate them together; for all your whole Strength lies in their being not asunder. They are

so sure you, need no other, and so unerring, that you must hit the Mark.

There is next a 3d, and I assure you no inconsiderable Case of plying all subordinate Means for facilitating a Design, and prospering an Undertaking. It is to be *attentive to little Things*, and by no Means to despise them. It is a golden Rule of Business, and of greater Importance than most People are aware of, *not to despise little Things*; the contemning of which has been the Miscarriage of many a one, and sometimes the Defeat of great Undertakings, which I think no body can be ignorant of, who is ever so little versed in History, or makes any Observation in the World. In Truth, the greatest Things that come to pass have their Beginnings in little Matters, and much of their Progress depends upon them, *Optima cujusque rei natura portionibus ejus minimis observata*. If we would make an accurate Survey of any thing, we must especially regard the smaller Portions, Divisions, and Relations of it. Do we then take notice how sedulous and circumspect the worldly Man is, in avoiding the very Appearance of giving Displeasure and Offence, in the smallest Things, to him on whom he depends and devotes himself for the sake of worldly Expectances? But who are so much obliged as the Children of Light to evidence the like Circumspection, and verify their holy Ties and Obligations, by a continual Regardfulness, never knowingly to offend him who is their Maker, and their God; from whom they profess to have received all their present Benefits and Enjoyments, and all their Hopes of better to come, placing their Happiness wholly in the View of his Favour? Is it not full as necessary and as wise in them thus to behave, seeing they are straitly commanded and cautioned to the same, *to avoid all Appearances of Evil*? The Integrity of their End is so far from
being

being disparaged by such a Regard to small Things, that in very Earnest their Innocence and Safety mightily depend upon it; nor can they in any thing shew their Constancy and Prudence more to their Advantage than in this Caution; for both *Solomon* and Experience testify, that he *that despiseth little Things, shall perish by little and little*. If in one it is good Policy, or rather the Dictates of common Sense, *in doubtful Cases to chuse the safest Side*; so in the other it can be neither good Sense, good Faith, or good Conscience, not to be conformable to the like Practice.

There is another very useful worldly Maxim, which I heartily wish to see ingrafted into the Christian's Practice, where it cannot but flourish and bring forth good Fruit in abundance; that is to say, in all commendable and Christian Duties, to take Counsel only of one's self; in all hazardous Actions of others, that so the Blame may fall on others, if we miscarry. Would we pray, for Instance, in secret, give Alms in secret, and do the Business of a holy and divine Life, so as not to be directed, purposely to be seen of Men, but to save Appearances, how pure and sincere would our Carriage and Conversation be? What Proficients in Virtue, what Favourites in Heaven, ready to be crowned with the Glory they aspire after? And did we in all our spiritual Hazards take Advice of him in whom standeth our Help, and qualify ourselves to procure him on our Side, it would be impossible to blame either him or ourselves, because it would be impossible we should miscarry.—

I pass on now to say something briefly on

The *sixth* Qualification of Prudence visible in the Men of this World, which is that they are wont to shew a Moderation between Fear and Assurance in their Proceedings: They do not go Hand over Head, knowing that Hurry in the Execution produces Leisure in the Reflection, and that

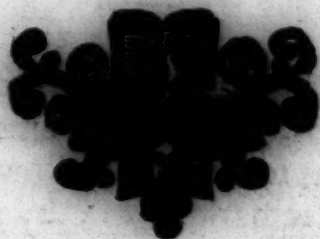
a Man is apt to stumble most when he runs fastest, and be mistaken generally when his Zeal outstrips his Knowledge; but they rather govern their Affair, and shape the Process and the Dispatches of it, according to that grave prudent Maxim, *fat cito, si fat bene*, as much as to say, *all is well that ends well*. The Man that is soon intimidated, or overconfident and secure, is not cut out for Business of Moment: But he that observes the Mean between these is the wise and successful Man; neither exalted with Advantages, nor depressed with any Degree of Slackness or Despair upon Mishaps; you see him govern his Passions, and command himself upon fit Occasions, and by that Means commands all Things; and look whatsoever he doth it prospers! And how perfectly requisite is it for Christians to form their Proceedings, and become Imitators of them in this good Piece of Conduct? For then would arise in their Vow of Duty, and Resolve of Obedience, no Difficulty to dishearten them in their Course, or make them fall away, which was not considered: But was every single Obligation to Duty previously weighed and consented to, as it ought to have been, there could hardly be any thing new or sudden effectual to shake their Constancy. And we should not see so many short Appearances of Piety, of as little Duration as a Morning Cloud; as if Men had only resolved on some Part of Religion, and never considered rightly what they undertook. Thence also would Christians be better informed not to hope without competent Grounds of Hope; neither presuming too much on one Hand, nor being overfearful on the other; but so tempering their Fears and Hopes of Salvation, as to have one in a Readiness to check the Excesses, and rebate the Extravagancies of the other; observing those great Criteria of our required Conduct, *to work out*
Salva-

Salvation with Fear and Trembling. It is good to fear the worst, and the best will take care of itself; giving good Heed to what *Solomon* remarks, *Prov. xiv. 15. The Simple believeth every Word; but the prudent Man looketh well to his Goings.* Then also after the Christian had learned the foregoing excellent Lesson, how happy would it be for himself, happy for the World, to find him begin to moderate his Zeal, and conduct it according to his Knowledge! How would the Confusion of Darkness clear up into Order and Unity of Mind; the Flame of Strife and Disputation be dampt, and we should come to a clear Elucidation of the Matter, and good Understanding with one another.

There is yet behind the *Seventh* and last Particular of my first General Head; *viz.* To manifest the Wisdom of the Children of this World, from the Care of retrieving Mistakes, and rectifying Slips and Misadventures, and to induce the Children of Light to the same sort of Prudence in their heavenly Transaction. The former, indeed, ought to be praised and propounded as an excellent Guide, of Management to the other. For no sooner are they sensible of being the latest in the Season, but they redouble their Diligence to fetch it up, setting a Price upon every Moment, till they regain what they lost; constraining themselves to redoubled Activity to make Restitution, and perform the Penance due for their former Negligence. And, because no Man is secure from Trips and Mistakes; the Wisdom that relieves all, and carries every Thing before it, is to rectify Slips and Failures as soon as discovered. Agreeably to this, you no sooner see the worldly Man down in his Race, but he is up again; renews his Efforts, and pushes his Endeavours more vehemently. He values bought Wit as the best, and puts it out to Interest, so as not to be

abused or disappointed twice, with regard to the same Thing or Person.—The burnt Child, without the use of Reason, dreads the Fire. How wary and wise, therefore, is he to take Warning from others Misfortunes, and not to err twice egregiously in the same Thing, not at all questioning but similar Causes will have similar Effects. If he has broke a Bone, or received a dangerous Wound in his Flesh, how speedy to seek and search for the proper Remedies, to submit to Advice, and conform himself unto the Methods and Discipline of Cure? If there is a Failure in his Fortune, he soon meditates upon a Composition with his Creditor; or a Blemish upon his Reputation, to wipe it off and retrieve his Credit: Or, is his dearest Friend disgusted by his Indiscretions, how concerned to regain his Favour? Do we not see these Things discreetly rectified by others, and daily practised by them, and by ourselves also? Why then do not we expostulate with our own Remissness in spiritual Concerns, for not applying to the same Remedies and Methods of Redress, for not repairing to the Standard of Repentance towards God, and Faith in our Lord *Jesus Christ*, that God has set up among us frail Creatures, (who are all of us Fools sometimes, which is the Mote which is *in every Body's Eye*) that we may heal the Wounds of Conscience, and make up the Breaches of our Covenant; compound with the kindest Creditors, in our Ransom and Redeemer *Jesus Christ* the Righteous, who for his Sake and Satisfaction will take all, as to our Part, we have or can perform for the immense Debt we have contracted: And, that we be not disappointed twice in looking for Happiness from the Things of this World, which will be sure to put the same Cheat on us always: And if Repentance has delivered us out of the Snare of the Devil, that we have a Care not to fall into it again, by returning to the same Sin:

Sin : But go on daily, rectifying what is amiss in ourselves every Day by new and better Obedience ; bringing our daily Sins of Omission or Commission to nightly Account, knowing that oft' Reckoning makes good Friends. All our Mischiefs and Miseries proceed from Neglect of present and effectual Remedy ; our Wounds fester, our Hearts harden, our Consciences become waste and shameless, our Iniquities terrify us ; we have no Peace in Life, and we are afraid to die : But let us without Delay repair to this Expedient, as the prescribed Cure of us erring and straying Creatures ; taking the Men of this Wold for a Pattern of Expedition, in redressing what is amiss ; following the Example of the glorious Saints and Penitents that are gone before us, and all will be well with us : That we may in truth be what we call ourselves, Wise Men, and be made eternally happy for being so.





S E R M O N

The Eighth.

*The Care and Caution of worldly Men,
in removing and avoiding Hin-
drances in the Way of their Design,
and in making Provision for the
Future, spiritually improved.*

A Third Sermon on L U K E xvi. 8.

*For the Children of this World are in their Generation
wiser than the Children of Light.*

IN order to improve under the Instruction of these Words, and be so amended by their Reproof, as to become Followers of the Wisdom they remark to us ; by way of emulating the wise Conduct of the Children of this World, in prosecuting their Ends, through such known Measures of common Prudence, which this Passage of Scripture readily suggests, and appeals to our daily Expertness in ; and with Concern upbraids us for shewing so little about it, *i. e.* for being found so dilatory and improvident (I mean the Generality of us) as to suffer the other to carry off the Character of being wiser in their Generation : In order, I say, that we might take an account of ourselves
how

how this comes to pass, why we, the same Persons in one Case, do not equal ourselves in the other, and so redeem our Credit for Reason and Prudence, it was requisite to enquire, (as I did in my last two Discourses) into the most authentic Rules and Methods of worldly Business in general; and by tracing the most common and pursued Steps through an Induction of so many leading Instances, we clearly discerned upon the Comparison erected in my Text, how much the Children of this World are wiser, but yet how easily we might equal their Management, and find Sureties, as it were, for our better Behaviour for the future, having Examples for our Copy continually under our Eyes, and in the Hands of our own Practices. For this End, I made, as you may remember, two general Divisions of the Parts and Offices of practical Wisdom and Prudence. I have treated of each of these Heads in my two former Discourses, under the Application of various Maxims of human Prudence, and worldly Business: And we may observe, upon the whole, with respect to the Success of each Affair, (tho' it is notorious how frequently every Man is apt to miscarry)

- I. A Consultation; then a Resolve; and then Application of the Means to the proposed End.
- II. A Guard and Caution, necessarily to be constituted for the Removal of Impediments, the Foresight of, and Provision against whatever Obstructions may probably happen.

The first regards the good Conduct of all Things present; the second a Safeguard for the future. And whoever orders his Matters so, as to be attentive to them both, humanly speaking, must succeed in his Designs; but divinely speaking, *i. e.* in the Language, which the Belief of a God, and his

his holy Scriptures dictate, it is impossible he should miscarry ; tho' he may possibly, whilst he negotiates his worldly Aims with all his Skill, and thro' all the likely Ways and Measures which the Wisdom of this World can invent. But let him only observe the same Care and Caution in prosecuting the Affair of his eternal Happiness, he may be infallibly sure of succeeding ; he may be perfectly certain, that God will interpose no Lets or Impediments, only perhaps as so many Steps to mount him the higher in it ; for the Exercise of that Industry and Vigilance which he is Master of, to the Glorification of his Virtue, and the Encrease of his heavenly Felicity. In the Case of worldly Affairs, after a Man has tried all the Expedients in the Store-house of human Experience, and drawn up all his hopeful Preparations, ready to take Possession of Success ; Almighty God, as a wise Governor, who ruleth for the Good of the Whole, and chiefly upon the Views of the Life to come, which he has notified unto us, not unfrequently, nay, very commonly, renders them abortive. So necessary are those visible Disappointments, in a careless World, for the Recognition of his invisible Being ; and for asserting his own immediate uncontrollable Governance over us. If the longest Sword always got the Victory in the Controversies of Nations ; or the Physician's likeliest Medicine constantly restored the Health of every Patient ; or any other experienced Method never failed of being prospered with the Event proposed ; who would almost reflect upon the Superintendance of the Almighty, or think of depending upon him ? But though he is often pleased, in the Providence of his Goodness, to withdraw his Consent to human Endeavours after human Things, yet it is known unto us all, That he is eternally pleased, and eternally
ready

ready to succeed and prosper the sincere Endeavours of human Prudence for attaining an happy Issue unto everlasting Life ; affording, moreover, all requisite Assistance to the same. As ever we pretend to hope for Success in the former, he expects our prudential Use of all the Methods, Helps, and Instruments, and the Exercise of our Circumspection as to Hindrance; and makes them as constantly necessary to be used, as our Pen to write, our Feet to walk, or our Tongue to speak : So, in the latter Case, of our Salvation, he indispensably requires our Application to all his prescribed Means, and our Guard no less against all known Obstructions : Which, together, makes it vastly more certain, to obtain Heaven, than what we aim at in this World. To this End has he delegated and trusted Reason with Men ; to this End has he been so indulgent moreover to us, to give us sure Instructions in Writing (so much the surer for being so) for the better transacting that Affair. Thus is human Prudence deputed an under Agent to divine Providence, for the accomplishing of the Things both of this World, and the next ; and it helps us to a good Christian Interpretation of those Sayings, *Prudentia sua cuique Deus est, & nullum numen abest, si sit Prudentia.*

And having thus far observed the Laws and Powers of human Prudence, and become more apprehensive of their Use in divine Things, under Variety of Particulars, in the first Head of Discourse, proceed we now in Method, to the

Second General Office of Wisdom, which shews itself in being upon the Guard, for the Removal of Impediments out of the Way of the propounded Design ; and, likewise, in foreseeing and providing against whatever may happen to the Prejudice or Miscarriage of it. If then we desire any Caution,

tion, or intend Circumspection for the Security of our immortal Aims, and for the better facilitating our heavenly Undertakings, we need be at no Loss, if we would but take the Children of this World for an Example of Sagacity, in this Respect. For in their Proceedings

Observe we 1st, how they clear the Way of Obstructions. If they have entered upon a Journey of any considerable Consequence, you do not find them diverted from what they are about with mere Amusements, or detained from it by Impertinencies: No; they are not such Children in Business as that comes to; and I wish, with all my Heart, every Christian would learn like them to lay aside the Child, and put on so much of the Man in their above-all-other weighty Business, as not to make their Life a mere Pastime, and spend the most, if not all their Days, in a Forgetfulness of the Affair they were born for, and sent into this World to perfect; suffering themselves to be carried off from it for Months and Years, by Avocations of any sort; as if Life itself was designed to be no more than a Diversion; tho' in the Parable of the *Talent* it is notorious, that the *idle* Servant is the very same that is called the *wicked* Servant. You see them, not to say yourselves, following the Chase of worldly Satisfaction, which, in respect of the other supreme Employment, are Vanity, Impertinence, and Digression; deluding much alike as the pursued Butterfly does the Pursuer; when he thinks he has it just under his Hand, it evades him so long, and so oft, that he finally loses his Breath in the Pursuit, and constantly dies unpossessed of the fugitive Good, and is received into everlasting Punishment, for rambling and trifling the Time away, in which he ought to have been about his Father's Business.

Again,

Again, and 'tis a Scripture Representation of worldly Men, 2 Tim. ii. 4. *No Man that warreth, intangleth himself with the Affairs of this Life, that he may please him who has chosen him to be a Soldier.* If, as a Soldier, he is disciplined in Defence against the Enemy, and his Thoughts and Skill are chiefly taken up how he shall vanquish him, and defeat his Stratagems; and for that Purpose keeps himself disentangled from Incumbrances that may unfit him for the Engagement, or give the Adversary any Advantage over him upon the Attack; Why is it not as necessary for the Christian, who has many Enemies that lie in wait for his Soul (his whole Life being a Warfare against them,) to be as vigilant and active in the like Guard of Precaution; to keep a careful Watch against all Approaches and Designs of his spiritual Foe; to be very jealous of his Motions and Ambuscades; to be therefore never busied and occupied to that Degree of Forgetfulness and Unreadiness, as to be *unaware of his Devices*; that he may not triumph over and lead us away captive, thro' Default of keeping Guard, or the Disadvantage of being hampered and disabled from making good our Defence by Means of a Load of worldly Afflictions and Impediments about us? So exceeding necessary is it for us to redress this by an Imitation of the other; that without some good Measure of the others Vigilance and Conduct, we shall perish everlastingly by an Enemy, that is ever watching Advantages against us, and ever irreconcilable to us: If one is a Life of Hardship, so must we likewise think of the Endurances and Difficulties in our Way, that are as surmountable by us, as the other by them, by an equal soldierly Courage; would we, like them, fore-arm ourselves also with the Caution and Resolution requisite to encounter and subdue them; neither embarrassed with Difficulties we did not foresee, nor overpowered with

with Superiority we did not consider; like the King in the Gospel, who declared War against another King, without ever considering whether he was able to make Head against him, and give him Battle; and so was forced to beg a Peace: For Abilities of that Nature do not altogether lie in the *Indies*: They may make Bullets of their Gold, and Swords of their Silver; but they will serve rather to enrich than harm their Adversaries. As it is therefore a Maxim of the worldly Man, to foresee Dangers in the Consultation of Affairs, and in the Execution to overlook them; so let the same be observed in the Conduct of our great Enterprize.

Again, as in Matters of Importance, one considers whether there are Examples of the like Case, that they may conform to their Pattern; so ought we to set the holy Examples of our Calling before us, as well to animate, as direct us in the same. If you see one so cautious as not to be induced to stab or drown himself; nay, nor yet be influenced by the Example of never so many (tho' they should be so mad to shew him the Way) Why are we not more afraid of evil Example? Why so easy to follow the many to be undone, and not rather take care to save one? If one is scared at the pledging a Cup of Poison, why the other so yielding to a Cup of Intemperance? If he that loves his Money can prudently shun extravagant Company; why do we value our Innocence so little, as to endanger it with wicked Companions? Does he that is entirely bent upon this World, not suffer the Religion of the other to interfere with his Designs; why then do we endure that the Cares of this Life should interfere to suppress the Cares of that we profess most to care for? Has a Man been sick, and is his Fear of a Relapse sufficient to make him refrain from those Things that occasioned his Distemper; how much

much more necessary, how much more profitable is it, for the Christian to abstain from those Temptations and Incitements that use to prevail over his Weakness, and be the Occasion of his Falling? No Christian is ignorant of the Sin he is most inclined to, and aptest to be soonest betrayed into; nor of those Occasions, Objects, Motions, and Beginnings, which use to carry him into the Commission of it; why then does he not learn to place his Safety in avoiding, as much as may be, the *Appearances* of them? Every Thing by an Instinct of Safety, knoweth its own Danger, and is afraid of the Approaches to it, even to the *very Child*: Does it not then become *Men*, to recal their own Experience, and have Recourse to the Journals of our former Lapses, that we may most carefully fortify our Soul in the Place where it is most weak?—This incumbent Duty belongs to the Office of Prudence, which is to record *Things past*, to be a Fund of Experience, and wise Acting for the *Time to come*; and he that makes none of those Observations for Practice, lives to little Purpose, and can never put in for the Name of a prudent Man.

Secondly, let us be advertised of another most especial Instance of Caution, and most eminent Degree of Wisdom, which is to foresee what shall probably come to pass, and make Provision against it.—This enters so far into the Praise of a wise Man's Character, that it makes the Distinction between him and the Fool.—This latter can make a Shift to do something with present Things, but he never considers *Consequences*; and when those overtake him, which were apparent to wise considering People long before, he is surpris'd, he is confounded, and fruitlessly laments himself with the ridiculous Repentance of, *Who would have thought it?*

it? All of us are wise sometime or other, but with this Difference, that some are so too late. From Observation and Foresight, *Solomon* distinguishes and describes the wise Man and the Fool, the prudent Man, and the simple one, *Prov. xxii. 3. The prudent Man*, says he, *foreseeth Evil and bideth himself; but the simple pass on and are punished.* And he elsewhere propounds the Pattern, and upbraids dilatory Man, who ought to maintain this Prerogative of Reason over the Brute, for falling so heedlessly short of the *Ant* in Apprehension, Ingenuity, and Providence, necessary to the Welfare of his Being. *The Ants* (one of those four Things on Earth exceeding wise) *are a People*, says he, *not strong, yet they prepare their Meat in Summer.* Those little People, with their little Reason, or rather Fragments or Shadow of it, so well argue the Case, that they abundantly provide by their great Industry against Winter, when the Time comes that none of them can work. Did you ever know one of them neglect that Provision for their future Happiness? or when did you see them idle in the Time of Working? Such a Creature as Man, who exceeds the other in the Glory of his Reason as much as in his Stature, might be ashamed to strut it so, unless he would show his Superiority at least by an equal Forecast.—I am not about to recommend to you that refined Sort of Discernment, or Talent of probable Conjecture, what may happen in Government, Councils, Enterprizes, and other human Affairs, which is the Result of much Knowledge and deep Observation (as the Privilege of few) though it helps to set off the Powers of Prudence in a great Light; as where it is said by the Historian in the Life of *Atticus*; *Prudentia est quædam divinatio*; which may be rendered by the *English* Proverb, *A wise Man is half a Prophet.* But I am now treating and improving
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to holy Purposes that *common obvious Foresight*, which is in every Man's Power ; and none, no not of the meanest Understanding, need be without it, seeing it is what he keeps by him rusting, and unused, though the very Safety of his Being lies at Stake, and depends upon it ; or rather is to worse Purposes used daily with great Sagacity and Address in the common Transactions of Life. This is what the Parable of the unjust Steward emphatically urges and bears hard upon us for a Reformation in, and very lively and strongly presses us to a right Use of our Faculties, and of the Understanding or Foresight which God has given us, for the Security of the Good, that is properly ours, in a future and everlasting World ; where there is only Satisfaction and Accommodation to be found for those divine Faculties within us, which thirst and ever want something in the greatest Redundancy of this World ; and that something is Heaven, from whence they were breathed, and for which we were ordained ; exclusive of which, and a free Choice and sedulous Endeavour after it, it had not been worth the God of Heaven's while to have bestowed the Faculties of Wisdom and Reason upon us Men. A little would serve well enough to cater for the Flesh, and there needed no farther. Is it possible then to read this Parable of the unjust Steward, which my Text presents to Consideration, and at the same Time refrain from making Reflection upon our own Improvidence ? Or cease to imitate his Prudence, and equal his Foresight, in a Provision so much more necessary, for a Life, for a Concern infinitely surpassing his ? Did he, as soon as ever he heard of the Danger he was in of being dismissed from his Stewardship, immediately cast about which Way he should provide for his Well-being, and save himself from Ruin ? Do we read this, and do we still live thoughtless of any Stewardship,

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ardship committed to us, thoughtless of its ever having an End, and as thoughtless of any Account to be given? Did he leave nothing unforecast, and undone, for the Subsistence of a Life that is but for a Moment? and do we provide, and do almost *nothing* for a Life that is eternal; deserting the Conditions, and regardless of the Qualifications that must render it such to us; and take to the careless Ways and wicked Practices that must make it eternally miserable to us in Punishment and Perdition? We think we are in our Place, or Stewardship *for Life*; and so we are indeed: But then what is Life? even a Vapour, daily and hourly fleeting. Who can be sure of To-morrow's Dawn? So precarious is that, yet so secure are we.

In all other Business we can bethink us, *That Forecast is as good as Work*, and consider To-day what may likely happen To-morrow, conjecturing very right what is to come; but in providing for Eternity, the Thoughts of the Generality are benumbed, and they act as if they had put their Forecast behind them, and their Understanding under a Bushel. If they hear of any Warning, or suspect any Danger of being turned out of their Dwelling-House; they look out for another, and are early enough in providing; tho' it is not impossible but that they may agree again with the Landlord, and take a new Lease: But tho' they know themselves Tenants at Will to the great Lord of the Universe, and have no Lease, no Promise, no Manner of Assurance of staying where they are, so much as until the next Quarter-Day; yet in this great Uncertainty (which should above all Things necessitate us to an early Provision) they never think to any Effect, or never seasonably resolve in their Mind, where they shall be received, and what shall become of them. But in the Career of their Security, Death comes and arrests them,

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puts them into Confusion, turns them out of their Stewardship, carries them before their Lord and their Judge, and bids them *give an Account of their Stewardship, for they shall be no longer Stewards.* It ought not to be credited for our Reputation, that we are so acute, wise, and provident in one Case ; and in the other, which is a Matter of Life and Death eternal, so supremely thoughtless and supinely improvident. We ought to be astonished at such Proceedings ; we should be ashamed of living such a Reproach to Reason and ourselves. If ever we would shew one Act of Reason in our Lives, let it, I pray you, be for the Amendment of this unreasonable, this ruinous Improvidence of ours. For how can we shew we have an Intellect above the Horse we ride on, if we continue to neglect this, the Neglect whereof betrays the greatest Absence, or rather Reverse of Understanding, that can be shewn ; more indeed than can be accounted for, or reconciled to the Pretence of having Wisdom and Prudence. If one is quick and present to take the least Hint of Danger, and provide accordingly ; and that one is none other but ourselves in all other Cases, why so scandalously unlike ourselves in not taking Warning in the grand Article of Danger, that threatens to overwhelm us with unsupportable Destruction, and hangs over our Heads every Moment ? If we were not told of it, indeed there might be some Excuse ; or if a future State was a meer Conjecture, there would be some Pretence to demur ; if the Way and Means of making a future Provision in Heaven, were neither certain nor plain, nor easy upon Use, it might be admitted as a Plea for putting off, and still deferring those Cares : But when we are fully informed, when we are continually warned and admonished, well ascertained of the Thing, and of the Feasibility of it, and firmly pretend to believe

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believe it too ; when in the Midst of Life we are in Death, and in the Midst of seeing others called away from our Right-Hand, and from our Left, to give up their Accounts, we can still find in our Hearts to forget *our* Accounts, and postpone the Thoughts of them. How can others call us Men, or we call ourselves Christians, whilst we are thus absconded from ourselves, our Understanding, and our common Salvation ? But our absenting ourselves at this Rate, will never hide us from the Danger, but bring it Home to us the sooner, as Abusers of the precious Talent of Life and Understanding ; living not to the Trust and Purpose of either ; having Ears, but will not hear ; Eyes, but will not see the Things that belong to our everlasting Peace. “ He who passes Days and Nights
 “ in Chagrin and Despair for the Loss of-an Em-
 “ ployment, or some imaginary Blemish in his
 “ Honour, is the very same Mortal who knows
 “ he must lose all by Death, and yet remains
 “ without Disquiet, Resentment, or Emotion.
 “ This wonderful Insensibility, with respect to the
 “ Things of the most fatal Consequence, in a
 “ Heart so nicely sensible of the meanest Trifles,
 “ is an astonishing Prodigy, an unintelligible En-
 “ chantment, supernatural Blindness and Infatua-
 “ tion, says *Pascal*.” Have we not Cause to be startled ? For what, I pray, moved the Lord in the Parable to dismiss the Steward from his Post, and discard him from all future Trust and Favour, but, as we read Verses the first and second of this Chapter, *He was accused of wasting his Lord’s Goods ? How is it that I hear this of thee ; give an Account of thy Stewardship, for thou mayest be no longer Steward*. If Abuse and Mismanagement was the Reason of displacing him from his Trust ; can we, I beseech you, believe that we do not stand very ticklish in ours ? If we look to the Waste and
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Mismanagement we have been guilty of, we ought to be in the utmost Apprehension of being turned out the next Hour, as unworthy any longer of the Patience and Forbearance of our Lord. Do we not know *that Forbearance is no Acquittance*? Does not our Lord, does not our own Conscience accuse us of embezzelling our Time in wicked Works or fruitless Devices? of neglecting to improve the Talents and Opportunities committed to our Management, and of diverting them to foreign Purposes, even to the Dishonour of him that gave them us, in his Favour? Can you deny this, Sinner, and will it never be Time to think what will become of you, when you are turned out of your Stewardship? Is the provoking your Master more and more, the true Way to preserve his Favour, and make you safer in your Trust? Do you not rather tremble to presume at that Rate? Can you find any Hole to creep out of Sight on that Day? And is not he the greatest of Fools that thus forgets himself? O how froward and hard-hearted are you against your own Happiness, and your present Opportunity of making yourselves for-ever, if you can entertain a Thought any more of deferring to bless God for sparing you so long, and granting you the present Time, and the good Inclination of making your Peace with him, and desiring of him a longer Space of Life, only for the Sake of perfecting what you have so long neglected; till you retrieve, till you expiate past Tardiness, by a more remarkable Diligence and Circumspection!

We have all of us received a Trust from his rich Hands, though there is a Difference in Degree and Quality; and if we consider our Remissness and ill Husbandry, have too much Reason to be afraid, that God will not throw away his Goods much longer upon us, to make waste of; when they are so far from answering the End he designed

them for, that we generally convert them to the quite contrary. I should be unjust to the Design of this Parable, if I did not instance the Talent of Riches, because it is peculiarly intimated in this Place: The next Words to my Text make this very Application, and a great deal of the Energy of the Parable belongs to it; *I say unto you, make to yourselves Friends of the Mammon of Unrighteousness, that when you fail they may receive you into everlasting Habitations.* It is with very great Elegance and Propriety that Riches are stiled *the Mammon of Unrighteousness*, in opposition to the *true Riches* and *godly Treasure*, ver. 11. by reason, as I conceive farther, that those earthly Riches are so *unjust* and *unrighteous*, as never to answer Men's Hopes and Expectations from them, nor yield in Enjoyment that Satisfaction they promised themselves. And I would observe further, that they may be stiled *unrighteous Mammon*, as this signifies, that as often as they are detained from being prudently dispersed and given to the Poor, they become a Master of Unrighteousness to the Owner. This seems to me the fairest Construction, because in the 12th Verse after they are stiled the Things that are *another Man's*, *αλλοτρίον*, as if others, the Poor and Needy, had a better Right and Title to *some* Proportion of them than the Owner: As this is exactly agreeable to the Notion of a Stewardship, for disbursing them according to the Will and Intention of the Master. What the Law of the Land calls our Property, God's Distribution makes a *Trust*: As long therefore as it is kept from the Poor, in the Proportion that Prudence directs they should receive, *they* are defrauded, and we are unjust and *unrighteous*; and therefore, as a Specimen of *our* Prudence, we are required to improve and distribute this Talent, and by the Distribution make to ourselves *Friends* that shall have a Being

Being when our Riches shall have none ; and thereby ingratiate ourselves into God's Favour, when they leave us in the Lurch ; and if he will be our Friend in that Need, that is to have a Friend indeed. These Applications to the 13th Verse all run, from the less to the greater : Therefore he that is so improvident as not to make good and faithful Use of *these least Things*, as they are called Verse 10. does not deserve to be trusted with what is better and greater ; admonishing and convincing all, who will consider it, that Riches are the least valuable Talent that God commits unto Man in this World, and that we have higher and more important Things put into our Hands in Trust, for making the needful Provision for our immortal Soul, Time and Opportunities, Health and Capacity, Knowledge and Grace, to improve and husband well to the saving our Souls, in the Day of the Lord's Reckoning with us : That we may be, every one of us, so provident and considerate as to look forward into Futurity, and reflect what our Condition shall be many Ages hence, as well as what it is at present. We say *that Gold may be bought too dear* ; and is not that irregular Pleasure, vain Honour, and unjust Profit, a bad Bargain, and a great deal too dear, that brings Penitence, a Pain of Mind, and without that Pains everlasting ? “ Knowing that
“ the Misery or Happiness reserved in the other
“ World lose nothing of their Reality by being
“ placed at so great a Distance (as * one well describes it) ; considering that the Pleasures and
“ Pains that lie hid in Eternity, approach nearer
“ every Moment ; and will be present with us in
“ their full Weight and Measure, as much as the
“ Pains and Pleasures we now feel at this very
“ Moment ; and for this very Reason be careful
“ to secure to ourselves that which is the proper

* The Spectator.

“ Happiness of our Nature, and the ultimate
 “ Design of our Being ; carrying our Thoughts
 “ to the End of every Action, and considering
 “ the most distant as well as most immediate Ef-
 “ fects ; it would help us to supersede every little
 “ Prospect of Gain and Advantage, which of-
 “ fers itself to us, whenever we do not find it con-
 “ sistent with our Views of Hereafter.” If the
Things that are eternal are not seen, yet their ever-
 lasting Duration is weighty enough to make them
 felt ; for they must over-bear with their Excel-
 lence, and weigh down all Comparison, with those
 who can compute of the little Finger and the Body
 which is biggest, a Minute of an Hour, and a
 Year which is the longest. Our Declaration (as the
 Children of Light) is *to walk by Faith and not by*
Sight ; we must therefore, if we would be as wise
 in our Way, as the Children of this World in
 theirs, be as diligent and active, studious of the
 best Means, resolute and speedy, constant and per-
 severing ; as consistent with our own Designs ; as
 careful to maintain a Medium between Fear and
 Assurance, and to rectify Slips and Mistakes ; as
 aware to obviate all Hindrances, and as sagacious
 to make due Provision for the future.

And now, did we in any Degree imitate the
 Children of this World in these commendable
 Steps of Conduct, how easy a Thing would Reli-
 gion be, how surely should we all attain Heaven.
 Did we make the getting thither any thing like a
 Business, it would be impossible that any Chri-
 stian should miscarry.—And what Business have
 we to compare to this ? All other Things that we
 can set our Hands or Hearts about, in comparison
 with and exclusive of it, is utterly wrong, mere
 Digression from the Purpose of our being placed
 in this World. This can never deceive us; we were
 made for that, and that for us: The other most
 com-

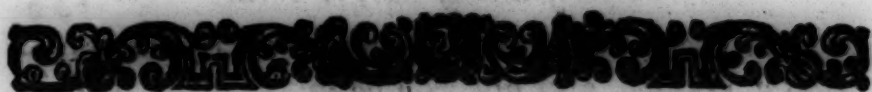
commonly has, does, and will delude our Labour; and the Vanity thereof is fore Bitterness in the End: Why then, for God's Sake, for our Soul's Sake, are we not more attentive to the Interest and Service of our *proper* Affair, wherein we are sure not to lose our Application, nor our Time? The same Pains, Care, and Management that get us an earthly Penny, rightly applied, would for every Penny procure us inestimable eternal Treasure.—What then is the contrary Conduct, but the egregious Folly of being Penny-wise and Pound-foolish? If Wisdom is seen in making a Bargain, in giving *little* for a Thing of *great* Worth, why do not we buy Heaven with our Pains, which are so comparatively small, and in reality so pleasant and light withal? How long, O Man! will thy Reason be Spectator of such Absurdity in Management, as to be only wise and careful about Trifles, but indifferent and unconcerned at the Ruin of thy Being? To be wise for a few Moments, and Fools for-ever? Nay, to be damned with more Expence of Toil and Forecast than would have served to save us for-ever? Did we look upon Hell to be as bad as begging, or Heaven to be equal to a Competency of Living; the unjust Steward could not outdo one of us, either in Forecast or Expedition, for escaping the one and securing the other: The Quickness of our Understanding would then be as conspicuous as his; and its Purblindness and moral Lunacy no longer complained of by God.—Account to God, and tell him if you can, who it is has given you a License to play the Fool *only* in the Affair of Salvation? For how much does God and his blessed Scripture forbid it? earnestly calling, inviting, and beseeching us, by the Name of Men, that we may shew ourselves Men in the choicest Articles of a Man. How can we forgive ourselves this prodigious Infatuation of our own
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contracting, or bear to live such a Contradiction to our Reason, or rather Scandal to common Sense?

If we wanted Understanding, then might we be pitied; but we have Exuberance of it, to prostitute at any Time, upon a Trifle. We shew that we have Power, Skill, Application, Judgment, enough, and to spare, for the effectual Furtherance of those Things that least of all concern us. Do we applaud ourselves for gaining this World? Then are we self-condemned for not securing the other better World, by the same Rules and Measures, and at the same Time. That I should dishearten your honest Labours and Sagacity for the Things of this Life, God forbid it; I wish you to prosper in them; the more you prosper, the more you shew you understand your Business; and the better you understand, and are expert in that, the more expert are you in the Ways to Heaven, and in the successful Methods of that blessed Business; only please to give them a Turn and Direction that Way, and they will more assuredly compass the heavenly superior End, than the earthly and inferior. Religion, and the blessed Author of it, is pleased to condescend to every Man in his own Way; they borrow his own Maxims, honest Rules, and Proverbs, and every useful Directory of Prudence; and shew him those Methods and Measures may be adapted for the raising him up to Heaven. Accordingly, most Business of Life has some Analogy to it; finds some Figure or Emblem for insinuating spiritual Admonition, and rendering it salutary to him; that so every Man living, in the Use of his Senses; may grow the more inexcusable for not getting, at the End of his Days, to that high and heavenly Felicity, and make it better for him, in case he wilfully misses of it, that he had been an Idiot from his Mother's Womb, or had lived under Ground, and had never seen the Sun.

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It would have been much better for us to have lived as a Worm, and not as a Man. It is the Mercy of God unto us, that he orders those worldly Maxims of worldly Wisdom and Conduct, to go with us to Heaven, and put us in the Way thither, and hands us on by Rules of Foresight and Industry, which we have at our Fingers End; that we might be allured, and at the same Time directed how to pursue better Things, from the Skill we have to manage little ones, and be as ingenious for our own Safety, as we are for our Destruction.—In a Word, Almighty God being always ready to assist, do you but consult your own Laws and Rules for succeeding in the Business of this World; advise with your own customary Management in the Particulars I have mentioned in these three Discourses; be enough prompted, be a little provoked, by Experience standing at your Elbow; and you have Wisdom, you have Power, and you have Skill sufficient to obtain this World, but most certainly and infallibly everlasting Life, in that which is to come. Now if any Man lack this Wisdom, let him ask it of God, who giveth liberally, and will upbraid none with such a Request. Let him join Piety with his Prudence, his Prudence will be increased, and his Piety the better conducted, and happy shall he be both in his temporal and eternal Welfare.



S E R M O N

The Ninth.

The great Duty of Reflection. The ruinous Effects of omitting, and the salutary Benefits of discharging it.

P R O V. Chap. iv. Ver. 26.

Ponder the Path of thy Feet, and let all thy Ways be established.

HOW long will it be true, and the Fault last, that Men will be Hearers of the Word and not Doers, deceiving their own Souls? Yet how easily might this be remedied, by *pondering*, and duly exerting the Attention and practical Application of their Minds, comparing their Mistakes, Forgetfulness, or Mis-carriages, by the Rule of God's Commandments? Nor is there, let me tell you, any other human Method whatsoever, to avail ourselves of the Word of Exhortation, the Use of the best Books, the Scriptures of Truth, or of our own Reason, but that of reflecting, considering, and applying.—What avails our knowing the Road to a Place? unless it is our Care to walk therein, advert when right, and return to that, as soon as we perceive ourselves wrong. In the Metaphor of the Text, our central Place is an happy Eternity strait on before

fore us ; and as in the Verse preceding, whatever Objects occur, we ought to use them so considerately, as not to lose Sight thereof in the Eyes of our Mind ; but, as much as may be, convert them all, at due Time and Season, to the carrying on that one great View. In the Verse after the Text, we are *neither to turn to the Right-Hand, nor to the Left*, as Pilgrims intent not to go astray, nor deflect from the Paths of Life. But when not careful to avoid the crooked Ways of Evil, how can the Feet of any of us keep the strait Road of Virtue and of Peace?—Our Way to Heaven, it is very well known, is keeping our Lives and Conversations obedient and conformed to his divine *Word* and holy Example, who is the only *Way*, the certain *Truth*, and in both Respects the *Life*.—But all that he has done for us, is still undone, and every Thing he has said is as yet unsaid ; the constraining Attractions of his Love, the moving Powers of the World to come, and all and singular the divine Persuasions and most gracious Arguments of the Book of God, will be no other than so many insignificant Cyphers, till you vouchsafe to hear them, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them in your serious practical Consideration.—How can we then, who are inwardly called by Inclination, and outwardly set apart by Office for making Men good, and in the Stead of *Christ*, for *beseeking them to be reconciled to God*, neglect our Part in not beseeching respectfully, in not exhorting frequently to the due Application of this great, this indispensable Means for being good?—Of all the Causes of the Decay of Piety, though there is no one more in every body's Power to help, Inconsideration is the chief ; inasmuch as it is that only which suffers any other Cause to take Effect : It is to be bewailed, indeed, as the Languor and great Distemper of the Mind ; as the Cause of its Ignorance,

rance, Incredulity, Prejudice, Malice, Pride, Avarice, and Envy, and under them of the subsequent Misapplication of every Passion and Affection. A no less shameful Abuse of Reason as we are Men, than of Christianity as we are Christians!

Now if there is too much Truth in what is premised, the greater, you must grant, is the Occasion for the Remedy propounded in the Text, and of your present Indulgence, whilst I endeavour to enforce the Obligations we are all under to *ponder our Paths*, and consider our Ways, from the following Observations.

- I. From the ruinous Effects, and the great Unreasonableness of not doing it.
- II. From the salutary Benefits, and the incumbent Duty of discharging it, with respect both to the Means, and the End of Religion.

Upon the first Head of Reflection, who does not behold with Pity the daily Miscarriages and Vices of forgetful and unpondering Men! Nor could the many Follies and Wickednesses of reasonable Creatures ever have a Beginning, much less any Continuance amongst us, but from the guilty Want of Reflecting. A Sin equally against their own Preservation, as it is against their Reason. — He that made us by a divine Participation, has wrought his own Image in our Frame, and principled us with a thoughtful Faculty, with Reason and Conscience, that ~~did~~ *did* ~~from~~ *from*, for knowing that we have that Maker; for understanding what was our Beginning, and what will be our End, and how the Behaviour of our transient Life has Respect unto that most certain End. — A Capability the noblest of any Thing below Angels, and which well exerted, would shew the Way to be like them, in the Knowledge of Good and Evil; and induce
and

and inure us to the Duties thence arising, and to the blessed Consequence of that Acceptance with God into the endless Rewards of his proportioning.—*God has set the World* (it is his own Expression) *in the Heart of Man*, that our Minds might join with our Eyes in perusing the divine Workmanship, the stupendous Skill of the Almighty Power and Goodness. Both the Greatness and the Smallness, the Make and Number, the Kind and Uses, as well as the Periods of Plants, Animals, and Stars, do all point out God ; do severally reflect the well-proved Instances of his infinite Wisdom, Majesty, and Beneficence to our reflecting Thoughts ; to make those Thoughts as certain of the Existence of him, his Attributes and Perfections, as of our own reflecting Faculties.—So should every one confess, it was he that hath made us, and not we ourselves ; hath made us out of small Beginnings, matching an immaterial Soul to Matter and Body, and multiplied Wonders in our human Frame, compounded and made up, as it evidently is, of Mortality and Immortality, Reason and Passion, Heaven and Earth : The external Parts of the Body being only subjected to our Command as Instruments of the Nourishment and Defence of the whole ; whilst the Main-Springs of Animal Life, the Inwards, Heart, Stomach, and Bowels of the greatest Sovereigns, as well as the meanest of the People, are still in his controuling Hands, to perform their Life-repairing Operations, without so much as asking our Advice.—For he orders those dependant Matters himself, by a Wisdom inscrutable, and for a Time unknown.—When he taketh away our Breath we die.—So much is God in, and through, and about us all ; and we all *live, move, and have our Being* in him.—Do we depend then upon his Protection, and daily subsist by his Long-suffering?
and

and shall we for that Reason spend the Days of our Life in offending against him? Or, foolishly, and more than brutishly, as some go on to do, make a Rebel of that very Being which exists by him?—No; this is of old protested against by the Gratitude of the Ox and the Ass, that Man ought not to be so unattentive to his daily Preserver!

Thus Nature, you see, furnishes both Materials and Obligations to live as we were made, thinking, reflecting Creatures; a standing Accusation, and the certain Confusion of their Excuses, who live, any where in this World, against Reason, and without the Benefit of Thought, Religion, and God.—The Beasts that perish want his rational Soul, to pay Praise and Obeisance to their Maker God; the Man has it, and has it at his Liberty only to taste their Pleasures, and live and die as stupidly as they, and therefore fit to be no more seen, as the Refuse of all Creatures under Heaven.—God is moved at it, as much as he can be, that there should be found a Man so perverse to his own Welfare, as to occupy Reason only to upbraid, not govern his Actions: The good Angels are affected with the Loss and Disappointment of those who were designed for their Society; the evil ones rejoice at the Folly; and the Cattle and creeping Things under his Feet would be amazed at it, if they should come to the Knowledge that their Lord and Master, *i. e.* any one of us, should stoop so low, as to aim at the same End with them, and glory in a Way of Life that leads thereto: Every thing is concerned for him but himself, and it is only possible for him not to be so for himself, but upon that wretched Account, because he forgets to reflect.—All sublunary Creatures are wise for themselves, but the wisest of them, Man, who is only neglectful of the best Effect of Wisdom, and the
very

very Use and End of Being——Would he for his Pains take the Name of Fool for acting thus, it would be consistent; but to be averse to pass for what he really is, and so impertinently arrogate Reason to himself, and act so unreasonably; Wisdom, and do so unwisely, is not only the great Reproach of human Understanding, but inverting the very Names of Things.

This, Brethren, is a severe Truth, as we are Men, but still is nothing in Comparison of what we know of our Danger as we are Christians: Since the Wisdom of God has so highly valued those Souls of ours, which are at such an Under-rate with us, as to give his only-begotten Son out of his own Bosom for their Redemption, passing by Angels when he took us into Favour, and at a Price surpassing all the Powers of Comparison, even the Effusion of the Blood of God.—Has he not put his Word into our Hands, and the Sound of it almost continually in our Ears, that *be that hath Ears to hear might bear*? Has he not gained Acceptance and Reconciliation to us Believers, to reward our Repentance and sincere Obedience? Or, if you turn the Prospect, are the eternal tremendous Punishments unthreatened to deter any Disobedience? Has he not brought Immortality to the clearest Light, making the Immortality of our Souls, and their future State, as plain to us as the daily Mortality of our Bodies? *How then shall we escape, if we neglect so great, so greatly easy Salvation*? For are not all the Conditions of our Felicity very easy to any Degree of Diligence? Are the Duties of Christianity any other than a regular due Growth unto the Perfection of human Nature, and the very Peace of our own Spirits? Is not the Knowledge thereof plain even to the Way-faring Man, measuring the Whole by the End of all, *the fearing God and keeping his Commandments*?

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Whence

Whence then comes it to pass, that so many give so little Heed, daily shewing very credible Tokens of their knowing no such Things? Has the God of our Nature made us impressible to Hope and Fear, Rewards and Punishments, and done all in his Power consistent with the Liberty of human Will, to affect the one with the most amiable, and the other with the most terrible Things? Wherefore then do so many spend their Days insensible of the great Stake, willingly forgetting, and continually postponing the main Purpose of Life, a Provision for hereafter?—What then, upon the Search, will be found to be the Father and Mother of these stupendous Absurdities, this Forgetfulness, but a chosen Incogitancy of spiritual Things, matched with their own Consent, to the wicked adulterous Love of this World? What Multitudes of Christians are there, who profess to live by Faith; to have their Heart, their Hope, their Treasure, their Home in Heaven, yet have so far lost the Remembrance, and laid aside the Notion of such heavenly Things, as to act in Earnest, as if the Reverse was only true; having Hearts and Affections only for Animal Good, pursuing this World with an engrossed Industry, as if it was their sole Affair, without that Desire and Longing as if it was their only Happiness, and with that Preference, as if it was their ultimate End?—The *Light may shine* long enough upon *Darkness*, before it will be *comprehended by it*, if the Lovers of *Darkness* resolutely keeps the Door shut against it. Surrounded as we are with so many Means of Truth, and so many Overtures of Light, it is not in our Power to make the Shift we do, to prevent the Knowledge of God's Truth, or the practical Improvements of it, but by our not adverting at all to it, or doing it by some short desultory Thoughts; no more than the open Eye can help seeing Things at Mid-day, by any other Method than that of looking off. It is

is easy and pleasant for one to distinguish Colours by looking on ; so is it for the other, I mean our Will, the Overseer of all Acts of Consideration, to lay the Truth of Duty before the Understanding, so long as to think most seriously, and very religiously upon it ; the Consequence of which assuredly would be not only the approving Things that are excellent, but likewise the doing of them.

Plain it is, and acknowledged by all, that there must be Attention, before there can be Assent to any moral Arguments or Motives. Tho' the Reasons for Religion and serving God outweigh this whole World (as they actually do) still we can feel no Manner of Weight in them, before we put them into the Scale of Consideration, and ballance them together.—So universally true is it of us all, that all our Follies and Sins proceed more from Inconsideration of our Duty, than our Ignorance of it !

How many Ways has God to bring us to ourselves, to recollect our forgetful gadding Thoughts musing upon many Things, to fetch home our absent Mind, bring us and Reason to converse together and act together, that he might advance us to holy Wisdom, and crown us with everlasting Happiness ? Yet how many Artifices have simple Men to defeat them all jointly and severally ? When lost to the Ways of first loving him, by letting our Love run in the Profusion of its Embraces to this vain fickle World ; he often checks us with Losses, and would fain stand in our Way by the Adversity of Disappointments, able, if any thing can, to raise from the Dead the Power of Consideration unto Life. He speaks to us as the Knower of our Hearts, in a Language that reaches the Heart, that holy Oracle that is in all our Hands ; he utters his Voice in the Word of Exhortation, reminding us of our Errors, and convincing us of

our Sins ; he many times argues the Case ; he frequently promises and invites ; he is sometimes angry and threatens : Again, in many Scriptures, he entreats and beseeches ; he would throughout the Whole, freely pardon all that is past, graciously assist our Weakness, and amicably guide us with his Counsel ; and, if we would do any thing to Purpose for ourselves and our Lives, after that receive us into a most glorious Felicity : He adjures us by the Love we bear ourselves to hearken ; he expostulates with all that is rational, with all that is Christian in us, not to disappoint him any longer in redeeming our Souls : He calls to all that is on his Side in us, not to prostitute his Image to Vice, or turn his Honour any more to Infamy, but shine forth in Virtue and good Works, and become the Habitation of God through the Spirit.——

Now after so much Exuberance of divine Love, and heavenly Importunity of Addresses every where, that there should be any where found one wicked and incorrigible Christian, is more than could be expected ; but that they are still so many, so very many, who can forbear deploring !

How many Things do we know, and yet do not know them, because we draw no Consequences from them ; and if we pretend to say we never thought of them, it is the greatest Folly that can be expressed in so many Words ; nevertheless, is any thing more usual with most People, than to “ think no more of them than they do of their dying Day,” as the idle Phrase is ?—We every Day, for Instance, see our own Faultiness in the Defaults of others ; yet for Want of Application, and drawing the Consequence right to ourselves, we are generally blind to the Emendation of our own ; we censure not in that Looking-Glass where the Censure should commence, till at length we forget that we are guilty ourselves of the same Things or worse ;

worse ; but if the Reproaches of Conscience are clamorous, we try to abscond somewhere from them in the Throng of worldly Company, Business, or Pleasure.——

Again ; we know very well that God is continually present with us, about our Bed, and about our Paths, observing our Thoughts, Words, and Actions ; that he remembers what we forget ; yet we make a Practice of corrupting ourselves, and doing Despite to him, as if he knew nothing of the Matter, or could not, or would not call us to account for the same. Draw but the Consequence right, which the least Consideration suggests, that thou art affronting him to his very Face, that all thy Transgressions, with or without mortal Witness, are equally open and odious before him, and then go and sin with that Restraint, if thou darest.

Again ; we experimentally know that the Goodness of God endureth yet daily in his most gracious Forbearances and Long-sufferings : What other is the rational Conclusion that flows from thence, but to lead thee to Repentance ? When Mercy and Clemency fail of winning upon a Rebel, he must be committed to some affecting Terror. But tho' the Door of Mercy is open To-day, that every one may be a Day short of despairing in his Sins, the Voice of the Lord that calls To-day, does as good as tell you, that your wilful Refusal To-day hardens your perverse Hearts, and consequently turns God more against you, and your Hearts more against him To-morrow : Why then, in the Name of Common Sense, will any of you go on to argue so preposterously, and infer still on so inhumanly and unaccountably, as to think of deferring any more till To-morrow ? To defer till then---what is it but to cast Lots for Salvation, and put that infinite Importance to the Risk, which was in your Power to have secured ?—Is Ingratitude, or Insult against a Mercy that is armed also with just Vengeance,

the best Proof of your Consideration of these Things?---Then let casting yourselves deliberately upon the most perilous of Dangers be accounted the wisest Instance of Contrivance for your own Safety. But *whofo is wise, will ponder these Things, and they shall understand the Loving-kindness of the Lord*, so as to have an immediate Kindness, and Mercy for themselves.

Do not we know, again, that our Life is a very uncertain Thing? Yet uncertain as it is, our supreme Business, a Preparation for a future State, depends upon it. Nothing is better known than this, yet than this there is nothing less generally known in human Life, I mean less considered.--- Can any one that hears me now, want a Memorandum, or a Summons of his own Mortality? when the Funerals or Graves moreover of Contemporaries, and Relations, are so often before them! Yet in spite of all these Momentos, Multitudes have been, but I pray God they may be no more, so thoughtless of their great Change, they put off the Reformation of their sinful Life, as an evil Day far off; they often enough think, that a true Repentance is never too late; but they never so much as suppose or imagine, that a late Repentance may not be, and seldom is, valid to Salvation. And some have so often adjourned the Consideration of their Ways, and the Amendment of their Lives, that their Minds are grown impotent to the Work, having no Desire; neither can they find in themselves the least Beat of Pulse for eternal Life. So very fatal and judicial an Evil is the wilful Habit of not *pondering our Paths*! And what is it that brings a considering Creature to this deplorable State, but the not using seriously that Consideration which God has given for *working out their own Salvation*? O foolish and unwise! to be so long an Enemy to thyself, as is actually every Sinner against

gainst his own Soul : Nor is it a Combination against God only, but against all the Interests of thy own Peace and Happiness ; not only against Religion, but against Reason ; nay, even against Common Sense itself.

For, in Default of that Consideration, which ought to dwell with every Christian, behold what a Cloud of witnessing Absurdities appear daily against them, to call in Question both their Reason and Christianity !——As they go on, do they not evidently live as if they were in utter Imperception of their own Preservation ; repulsing that from their Care, which is the very Crown of their Life, all that can, in Propriety, be said to be worthy of our Consideration. They have extinguished Reason, I mean to say, all that is worthy in it, yet they boast of it ; dream, as it were, all the Day long, but still insist they only sleep at Night ; prefer a Bubble in Hand to the Incertainty of an eternal Crown of Glory ; are indolent and merry upon the Brink of Destruction ; Betrayers of Christ, under the Friendship of his Name ; or Deniers of God, under the Cover of professing to believe in him : Effects as to them are without Causes ; Excellence without Liking ; Misery and Ruin without Fear or Dread ; Judgments without Design or Amendment ; Faculties, Means, Opportunities, without Use ; Words without Meaning, their own Mother Tongue without Sense or Sound : All good Books, and Publications of good Things, equally insignificant ; Bibles, Pulpits without Converts, and Churches without Religion.——Would you, can you bear to see all this summed up in one Person, it is in thy own self, thoughtless Sinner ; whoever thou art, *Thou art the Man !*——Yet Heaven will have Mercy on the Infatuation, provided we receive the Conviction with our outward Ears, and ingraft it inwardly in our Hearts, in order to desist from such

tested Folly ; and with all our Heart, Mind, and Strength, invite in, and sit down by the Light of Consideration, till it penetrate all our crooked Ways, and the dark Recesses of our Favourite Sin or Sins, and rectify every Irregularity of our Paths. And so I enter upon the saving Benefits of that excellent manly Duty, which was the second Thing proposed.

Now, if we would arise from vicious Security, put on the Habit of Advertence, and call in Consideration to be our Friend and Adviser, it would shew itself more and more, by joining with God in writing his Laws in our Heart and inward Parts; laying up there for Use his restraining Word, that we may desist from sinning against him ; treasuring up there the curious Works of his Hands for devout Adoration of him, and never forgetting the more wonderful Mercy of Redeeming us, as a continual Memorandum of the fullest Obligation to him all the Days of our Life. Then should we be as Angels, discerning between Good and Evil : Then, blessed Day ! would true Reason, then would true Religion, flourish. The Houses of God would see no Hypocrisy nor Irreverence in them : The Pulpits would be heard with Candour ; and a trusty Remembrance to amend what is amiss, and to do those Duties which the busy World is constantly prone to forget, and stands in Need to be reminded of, at least every Week of their Lives. The Book of God would obtain its blessed End, in teaching us to fear him and keep his Commandments ; giving those who are desirous and attentive to learn, right Notions of him, of themselves, and of Religion ; prescribing the Means, and pointing out the Ends of Religion, and in both Respects completely laying before us the true and only Way of Salvation. Every good Advice would have an Impression for Good upon us : Opportunities and Means would be embraced to the full Employment of our Powers.

Seeing

Seeing Judgments, we should learn *Righteousness*; and from beholding every where the obvious Operations of his Hands, we should admit the Demonstration of his Being, and of his being glorious in Power, Wisdom, and Goodness. We should learn to live in the precautionary Fear of the most dreadful, and in ardent Love of the most amiable Things. We should be found making as much Conscience of denying God in our Works, as in our Lips; and our common Conversation would become the Gospel of, and be no longer a Shame to, our Name in Christ. In short, Consideration would conduct Man to the Knowledge of that which is truly his Good, and that which is truly his Evil, and to the Means of enjoying the one, and avoiding the other. Every Thing would be in Order, 'as I may say, to revive heavenly Thoughts in us.

And, after all, is it not that Consideration which makes the proper Application of every serious Thing; teaching the right Use of this World; reminding of the Preference of the next in all our Labours; deducing and converging all the Good of our Knowledge to the Conduct of our Lives? Forasmuch as the most Knowing, without that sort of Application, will in Effect be still ignorant, and remain as speculative, sublime, and empty Clouds.—— Though we know the Scriptures, though we are firmly established in the Truth of them, still we receive, we can receive no Benefit, but through the other. — For none can become or continue a good Christian, merely because he once knew why he should be so; but from often considering the incomparable Reasons, and revising the comfortable and immoveable Grounds of it. For that Reason, our Minds must frequently converse with divine Truths, for Renewal of that which is Good. — Take away Light, all Things will be of one Colour; so take away Consideration, all would be

be thoughtless, more the Image than the Reality of a Man : But let one Man make due Use of it, and another not, there soon appears the Difference between the wise Man and the Fool.

In short, it is salutary and expedient to us all.—The Best will use it to call their Sins of Surprize and Inadvertence to Mind : The Wavering and Unconstant would, in the Use of it, find out the Reasons and Necessity of Perseverance, and of being more constant to that which is Good, which is the same Thing as to be true to their own Happiness. The deliberately Wicked and Impenitent, as they must perish without it, so with it they would, by Degrees, grow sensible of their Guilt, Danger, and Folly, and hasten to their neglected Happiness, by the Way of evangelical Repentance and Obedience.—He that can bring himself to consider, has got so much Ground, as not to be far from the Kingdom of Heaven : Where there is Space for Thought and Recollection, there is Space for Repentance. Let the Wicked suspend the Prosecution of Sin for some time, and accustom themselves to retire every Day to commune with their Heart, the bolted Door of Consideration would open, and they would behold Eternity before them, their Time of Probation short, and themselves miserable without a new Course of Life ; nor would their awakened Thoughts let them be at Rest till the Change followed.—

There is a remarkable Relation in a Treatise of Divine Providence *. I shall give it in its chief Circumstances.—

“ A Father of a great Estate had an extravagant undutiful Son, whom he had once resolved to disinherit : But on his Death Bed, sent for him, and told him, he would not only forgive, but give him his Estate upon an easy Condition, which he should solemnly

* Sir Humphrey Mackworth's Discourse on Providence, p. 48.

promise, before Relations and Neighbours present, to keep and observe. The Condition was this, *That every Day of his Life, after he was dressed, and ready to go abroad, he should lock himself up in his Chamber for half an Hour, without Company, Books, or any Thing to divert him from Thinking by himself.* The Son observed his Promise upon Honour, and strictly obey'd his Father's dying Command. And it was an irksome half Hour to him for a long Time, and was put to no other Use but to contrive and cater for his wonted Sensualities.—At Length, it came to his Mind, what should be the Meaning of his Father to impose such an odd sort of Command upon him.—It must certainly be, thinks he with himself, to recover me from my lewd Courses.—And thus by Degrees he became entirely convinced of the Vanity of a wicked Life; and finding great Satisfaction in his Resolution to change his Manner of Living, and consult Reason and Consideration in all his Actions; he forsook his ill Company, changed his whole Set of Thoughts, took great Delight in reading the Scriptures, and practical Discourses of Divinity, and became one of the most pious, most sincere, and most accomplished Gentlemen in all his Country.”

This History exemplifies the Subject before us; and this Matter of Fact, in its chief Import, applies itself to the great Duty I have been recommending. —And now, in Conclusion, if this is the Key of Divine Wisdom for opening your Thoughts to a righteous, sober, and godly Conversation, and every one of this Audience have it in their Power, who have the Use of Reason and Faculty of Consideration, I hope, I pray earnestly, that it may be as much your Resolution, as it is your Interest every Way, to make due and daily use of it.—

Consider what has been said, and the Lord give you Understanding in all Things.

S E R.



S E R M O N

The Tenth.

*Of the Divine Omnipresence. How to
be conceived, and the Advantages
of meditating on it.*

P S A L M xvi. 8.

I have set the Lord always before me.

TH E Omnipresence of God, which the Psalmist here sets before our Thoughts, and encourages us to regard in our Practice, as he himself did, is, as to the Manner of it, confessedly ineffable and unsearchable ; yet the Truth of it is undeniable, and as equal in Value to us, as is the Being of God : Seeing the Ground of all Religion is certainly laid in the Belief as much of his Providence and Inspection over us, as in his Existence with Respect to us. Is it possible for him to be a God to any one, to any Purpose of Religion or Duty, if he was not likewise a Judge to reward and punish according to our Behaviour ? But how could our Behaviour be judg'd, and truly brought to Account, if he was not an accurate Observer and continual Inspector of what-
ever

ever we think, speak, do, or suffer, with respect to those Laws he has prescribed to us?

In this Consideration our Psalmist elsewhere acknowledges this to be the very Reason of all his religious Deportment: *I have kept thy Precepts and Testimonies, for all my Ways were before thee.*

What is therefore so very much the Reason and Foundation of serious Religion, must needs be expedient at all Times to promote the Practice of it. Which I shall at this Time endeavour, by impressing upon our Minds the actual Application, and frequent Recollection of what we profess to believe of God in this Respect: Conducive, as I hope it may prove, to animate us to our several Duties, to restrain from any wilful Sin against him, and administer Comfort in all the Troubles and Adversities of Life.—— Whether we think of God as present, or not, he is nevertheless intimately so with us in all our Ways, Thoughts, and Words; and we can be no more removed from his Inspection, than from the Consciousness of our own Existence under him. It must needs then be our Prudence to reflect often upon it to the Purpose of a circumspect Behaviour before him, that it may end in our immortal Happiness in his Presence for evermore. --- And that we may be the more observant of this excellent Compendium of practical Religion, it may be proper,

- I. To mention some of the Ways of God's being said to be present, and our correspondent Duty of setting him always before us.
- II. To give a few Instances of the manifold Advantages of a constant Performance of it.

First, He is said, and that most constantly, to be in Heaven; and we are taught by his Son to pray to our Father *which is in Heaven*: That being the inward

inward Court of his all-glorious Presence, where he dwells in Light inaccessible, in such refulgent Majesty that the Retinue of Angels veil their Faces, and bow their Heads to his Footstool. There is the beatifick Presence, where there is *Fulness of Joy*, to glad the Souls of all *just Men made perfect*. Tho' he is constantly resident on Earth by his infinite Essence, yet he is but obscurely seen, and very imperfectly enjoyed by the best of us. Our present Weakness and Immaturity in the Body intercepts so happy a Sight, and our Sins render us unworthy of it.—Tho' equally diffused every where in his governing Power and Knowledge, it is in Condescension to the Manner of Men, who know only one Place for one Thing at a Time, that his Residence is so much reported to be in Heaven. We speak of him as there, as if he governed all sublunary Things from a Distance; and as Men manifest themselves in a Place, by moving to it, so God is said to descend from thence.

Therefore, *2dly*, is he more extraordinarily present in some Places than in others; *i. e.* by a Manifestation of himself to Purposes extraordinary, exerting some especial Powers and Providences on Earth; as in the mighty Things done from Time to Time to the Children of *Israel*, to whom he often gave a Signal of his Appearance by a visible *Shechinah* of Light.

Another peculiar Way of his Presence is, by his Grace and Benediction, as in the Sanctuary, and holy Places of his Worship set apart for his Service: Where he records his Name, and whither he calls us together to present our common Supplications before him, for all Things requisite and necessary, as well for the Body as the Soul; and here, as in the Publick, in the appointed Place of Audience, to receive his Blessing and Answer.

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He is found also to be especially present sometimes in his angry Justice, executing Judgments on the Ungodly, and in his distinguishing Favours and Deliverance of the Righteous: To these he draws nigh in the Comforts of his Spirit, and dwells with such as are of an *bumble and contrite Heart*; from those he is affirmed to withdraw himself, and to behold the Wicked afar off.

But in the more extended Sense, he is always present in all Places of his Dominion, by his Power and Knowledge, and consequently by his substantial Presence. Thus is he present continually to preserve, move, uphold, and direct all Things. He is not far from any of us; for, as the Scripture, and the Light of Reason acquaints us, *in him we live, move, and have our Being*. His Goodness diffuses Life and Breath, and all Enjoyments throughout the World. The Deity is to be seen in every Work of Nature; for every Work of Nature is full of him; every Lilly in the Field surpasses *Solomon* in all his Glory; and every Plant in the Garden, did we not so cursorily overlook them, all declare the inimitable Wisdom of their high Creator, and rehearse his Power. So plainly and undeniably are the Characters of the Divinity stamped upon the Operations of his Hands, in the Heavens above, and in the Earth beneath, that the Apostle, *Rom. i.* declares them without Excuse, who attained not, from the Consideration of them, the apparent Knowledge of the Being, of the Wisdom, and of the Power of the Goodhead. — And, in relation to ourselves, wherever we are, whatsoever we are doing, he is necessarily present with us; there is no Place to retire from his Intuition; be it ever so high, deep, remote, or obscure, he is equally there. The 139th Psalm elegantly represents this by an Induction of Particulars, enumerating

rating all the Places that ever arrived to our Knowledge, that not one of them could afford an Hiding-Place ; neither *Heaven* nor *Hell*, nor *Earth* nor *Sea*, therefore no assignable Place or Part of the Universe that bears any Name : That the *Darkness* and *Light* were both alike to his all-discerning Eye ; one no more hindered his Sight than the other promoted it. He is ineffably, yet most indubitably, present in all Places, at the same Instant of Time. He goes every Voyage with the Father, yet stays at home with the Mother and Children : If we turn to the Right Hand, or to the Left, still we meet him ; if we travel, or abide in our Place, he is equally with us, marking all our Goings, and numbering our Steps, and is about our Bed, and about our Path. His *Eye* is ever open to behold all Things done in *Heaven* and *Earth* ; he never *slumbers*, never *sleeps* ; sees every individual Thing with equal Attention ; past, present, and to come, being open and naked to one View of his divine Perception : Nor does the Variety of Objects distract it in the least ; every single Thing is as much the Object of his Sight and Care, as if there was nothing else to be seen or to be cared for.

And as nothing is too great for the Comprehension of his Knowledge, so nothing is too mean or inconsiderable to be the Subject of it : The underling *Sparrow*, and all its Circumstances, with whatever befalls it, our Lord tells us, is *known unto God* ; and he instances further, that the very *Hairs of our Head* are all numbered ; that neither a Feather of one, nor an Hair of the other, is out of its Place without his Privy. So penetrating is his Sight, that he saw our whole Contexture in our Mother's Womb, whilst he there most admirably adjusted our Bones and Muscles, Fluids and Solids, in a curious Symmetry of wonderful Variety, for the
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the Uses and Comfort of our transitory Life ; and when we are again dead, and covered up in the Womb of the Earth, he is present in the Grave, to keep a strict Account of our mouldering Dust.

But our Care in setting him always before us is principally engaged to him as he is an incessant Observer of every Action of our Life, every Word of our Mouth, and all the deliberate Thoughts, Intentions, and Inclinations of our Heart.-----The Scripture takes abundant Care to confirm us in this great Principle of a good Life.— A very few Instances may suffice in so plain a Case — With respect to the first, he is described to be that God by whom *Actions are weighed* : That the *Ways of every Man are before him*, and he *pondereth all his Goings*. The secretest Retirement contrivable will still be like an open Theater to him ; no Door can preclude, no Darkness hinder him from being a concerned Spectator. Be we never so subtle and successful to conceal it from every visible Eye, still his invisible one is conscious to every Circumstance.-- Does thine own Eye see it ? Then conclude, O Man, that he that made the Eye sees it also. *He that made the Eye, shall he not see ?*— Shall not he know every Thing, who teacheth Man the Knowledge of every Thing ?—Yes, he assures us, that he sets all our *secret Sins in the Light of his Countenance*.— As to our Words, we are told that there is *not a Word in our Tongue, but he knows it altogether*.— And in respect to our Thoughts, that he *understandeth them afar off* ; that he *searcheth all Hearts, and understandeth all Imaginations of the Heart*. He is present in the most inward Recesses of the Mind, discerning Sin, and watching its Growth from its first Rise and Motive in the Thought, till it is finished in Action ; and accounts what no other Person is able to account, of the Intention to Good or Evil, as a good or evil Deed ; in order to punish

for Evil what was fully intended, and to reward for Good that which wanted only the Opportunity to perfect it. He heareth and seeth the secret Ejaculations and Purposes of our Heart, as plainly as our loudest Words or most glaring Actions.

And that we might never forget how exact Account is taken in all Matters of Sin and Duty, and how particularly curious he is pleased to be in noting our whole Behaviour in these three religious Respects, he is represented in Scripture as entering the several Particulars into a Book, after the Manner of Men, who, to make sure not to forget a Thing, make such Entries and Memorandums : And several *Items* of our good, and of our bad Behaviour, are entered by the Omniscient Recorder, in his sacred Volume of Remembrance, and all the aggravating and extenuating Circumstances set down and filed up before him : Therefore whilst he is not extreme in the Reckoning, to mark what we have done amiss, he suffers no presumptuous or impenitent Offender to escape with Impunity !

Seeing then that God is intimately present with us, and so perfectly knows all that we do, speak, or think ; and that it is our Duty to consider him thus related to us in all Branches of our moral Conduct ; let us consider,

Secondly, Our Interest, and some of the Advantages in the Practice of it, as so many Inducements to our most careful Performance of the same.

I. Did we *set the Lord always before us*, this would be a most powerful and never-ceasing Restraint from Sinning against him. For will not this Consideration that God's Eye is continually upon us, make us as careful against committing any Sort of secret Sin, as we would be of any kind of open Immorality ? For where is that secret Place for the Sinner to retire to, where God is not present to see what he is engaged in ? Or is there Darkness or Co-

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vering sufficient to skreen from his View (however endeavoured to be concealed in the utmost Privacy) or hinder the Fact from being as naked and apparent as if done upon the House-Top? Whoever thou art that encouragest thyself in Sinning in Secret, so that no Eye sees thee, thou forgettest thyself, thou art miserably disappointed; and however it was unconsidered by thee, God was Witness all the Time. Thy Judge caught thee in the very Fact; and if thou wantest any Evidence to that Truth, call in thy own Conscience, Man, and that will, to thy Confusion, attest the very same.* — And wilt thou any more, under the Sense of this Reflection, presume to transgress wilfully in his Sight, who has Life and Death temporal, Life and Death eternal at his Disposal? Or can you have the Baseness thus to fly in the Face of your best Friend, your Saviour, your daily Preserver, standing by you every Moment of every Day you live? Yet every wicked Person (did he but consider this manifest Truth) does thus presume, who presumes upon his Secrecy.

One would really think that every Sinner who ventures upon a secret Crime, denies the Omniscience of God, or, at least for so long, entirely forgets it. — To God only it is known how many in the World act and behave in it, as if it was their governing Maxim, that what is not known to the World to be done by them, is not really done by them.

Open and notorious Wickedness is unquestionably more mischievous and scandalous to Religion, upon Account of the Infection of Example; but Sins done in secret are nevertheless, as to the Person offending, as great a Contempt upon the All-seeing God, as the other. For evident it is, that such Persons have a greater Fear and Reverence for

* *Quid prodest non habere consciam habenti conscientiam?*

Men than for God. They profess to believe in general, that Almighty God is every where present, and conscious to all they do; yet have the Supineness and Incogitancy to commit those Transgressions with all Frankness under his Eye, provided they are concealed from human Cognizance. They would blush to be found to commit the same before a mean Person, nor could they find in their Heart to be guilty of an Indecency before a grave one.-- And, if in fact the Presence of a considerable Superior coming into a Room strikes an awe, and puts an immediate sudden Stop to every unbecoming Extravagance carrying on there; ought not the Presence of the Omniscient God to be respected as a more potent Preservative for restraining every Body from the same?—That Secrecy should be an Encouragement to most of the Sins that are done in the World, (as most certainly it is), and yet those very Transgressors have not cast off their Belief that God beholds all that they do in Secret, is the strangest Inconsistency in the World; a Believing as if they believed not, or a kind of Thinking without any Thought at all: An Awe and Reverence for God being the only effectual Restraint upon the Mind and Conscience. Men may, and do sometimes, sin away all Influence of this in Private, much sooner than they will venture to appear in Publick, to have done it; and when once they have conquered the Reverence for God and their own Conscience, which a Custom of wilful Sinning in private will certainly effect, they will dally with Repentance and Amendment, till, through Debility, or Want of Opportunity, they can sin no longer. And whoever makes a private Practice of breaking through that sacred Disposition, which should habitually have the Influence of Duty upon him, he is not able to ascertain where or when it will end. Which shews the great Value and Necessity

cessity of religious Sincerity, that we should ever be as careful of our Actions in private, with respect of pleasing or offending Almighty God, as if they were all done upon a publick Stage; esteeming his seeing to be more to us, than if all the World besides beheld us.—What signifies whether Man is by or not, if God and Conscience are inseparably present, by whose Witness, and by whose Sentence we shall be one Day justified or condemned eternally?

Granting every Sinner all the Success he proposes to himself, in carefully hiding his vicious Practices from Men, and escaping their Censure and ill Opinion; who, in Truth, can harm him little upon the Discovery: How absurd is that Precaution; if he is in the mean time exposed to him, who can destroy both Soul and Body in Hell? I say unto you what our Saviour says unto us all, *Fear him*. For what other Purpose is this awful Truth proposed to our Thoughts, but in order to strike us with Shame, Confusion, and premeditated Repentance for what is past; and fill us with that august Sense of the divine Infinity continually present, as to be a continual Restraint from sinning against him?

Of all the Helps that are in Man's own Power, nothing can be a surer Preservative, nor any thing a constanter Safeguard against Sin, or Monitor to Duty, than the Habit of such a Reverence, recollecting in whose Sight we are.—Is it morally possible to remember God present, and so nigh to us, and at the same Instant not remember our Duty to him, and the Behaviour he expects from us? Surely such a Thought made present to the Mind, and by our own Care set before it, would make us instantly desist from the Presumption of offering to affront so an Almighty Being to his Face, and prevent our doing it. All Inclination to Sin, one

would think, must hang down its Head, and shrink from the Face of such a Consideration ; and at the same Time it must invest every one of us with the holy Resolution of the Patriarch: *How can I do this great Wickedness, and sin against God?* against God, who sees me, and will certainly take an Account of me for it.---As bad as Men are, it is almost impossible to arrive at so hardy a Stupidity, as resolutely to affront their Maker and Judge to his very Face : It is in a Manner incredible, I say, that they should offer so to do, as long as they retain the Belief of him upon their Mind. But therefore it is that they so often transgress against him, because they so seldom think of him. This is accordingly the very Characteristick of the *wicked* Person given by our Psalmist, who assigns it for the Reason and Cause of his being such, *That he had not God before his Eyes : That God is not in all his Thoughts,* nor scarce at all there : *That he flattereth himself in his own Sight,* until his abominable Sin is found out. How, say they, *should God perceive it ? Is there Knowledge in the most High ?*

But as we have any Fear of the Vengeance of the Wicked, or due Sense to prefer the Lot and Character of good and godly Persons, we must resolve to pursue a Practice quite contrary to the former, and resume and make due Use of that sovereign Remedy against Sin, which the other so wickedly laid aside. And as their Forgetfulness of the Presence of God is their Sin, and the Cause of their many Sins ; so let it be our Care and Duty to be made full of it, that we may be mindful of all other Duties.——This Memento of the Royal Psalmist, is a short Lesson of holy Wisdom, easily learned, than which I know not how to recommend a better out of all his Writings. Such is its Excellency, that the most Learned cannot have a better Rule of Life, and the Ignorant may equal them

them in the Practice of it. This is what the Scripture means by *walking before God*, in its distinguishing Praises of those that did so, as upright Persons, and in the highest Favour with the Almighty. The same is meant by *remembering our Creator*; by *not forgetting God*: And if all the People *shall be turned into Hell*, who live in that Forgetfulness; or, in other Words, all the Wicked; we have no Way to escape, or any where to retreat, but to the Observance of *setting the Lord away before us*.

To recollect always with ourselves, that God is present in all our Ways, would make us good and holy, sincere and upright, cautious of Evil, and Followers of that which is good. Did we at all Times carry this holy Antidote about us, how would Sin retire away, not daring to shew its Head, no not in the closest Retirements? The Thoughts that the Avenger is by, gives a mighty Repulse to any Temptation, damps and intimidates any Compliance with it. The due Observance of this single Rule would make us all Christians indeed.---Our Faith, Fear, and Love of God all depend upon it, and are severally strengthened by it. For does not the Integrity of our Hearts moreover spring out of this, that there is a God who stands by, who knows our Intentions? The Remembrance of him standing by would impress such a deep and affecting Sense of his Displeasure, and diffuse such a godly Influence on our whole Behaviour, that we should continually seek to do that which is well-pleasing in his Sight, and demean ourselves at all Times, and in all Places, as those Servants of his, whose Care it is to *walk before God in all good Conscience*.

In short, it would banish Hypocrisy out of the World, that Bane of true Religion, and bring in an universal Reformation into our Thoughts, Words, and Actions: For under the Influence of

this Recollection, who will not be extremely careful of his Words? How backward should we be of uttering Speeches that may do Hurt, or of taking up a Reproach against our Neighbour, seeing it is so displeasing to the divine Presence? How could we venture to lye, in Company of divine Truth? Or swear, or prophanely take his Name in vain on such trivial Occasions, whilst he is by to hear all such Contumely and Provocation? A Veneration would rather strike us, and an awful Watch shut up our Lips so close, as they would not open in Offence to God or Man; but our Conversation would be like that of the primitive Christians, 2 Cor. ii. 17. *As of Sincerity, as of God, and in the Sight of God.*—Very fit to be remembered is the Advice of the wise Man*. *Inquisition shall be made into the Counsels of the Ungodly, and the Sound of his Words shall come unto the Lord, for the Manifestation of his wicked Deeds; for the Ear of Jealousy beareth all Things: Therefore beware of murmuring which is unprofitable, and refrain thy Tongue from Backbiting, for there is no Word so secret that shall go for nought, and the Mouth that belyleth slayeth the Soul.*

And we should certainly be more circumspect with regard to any deliberate Wickedness in our Thoughts, since he *trieth the Reins, and weigheth the Spirits.* God is a Spirit, and consequently more peculiarly present with our Spirit. And did we but recollect, whilst we are musing upon many Things, that all deliberate evil Intentions and wicked Scenes of the Mind, which is the moral Part of Man, are exposed to the Cognizance of him who judgeth us, we should grow afraid to entertain Malice, or Envy, or Contempt in our Heart against our Brother: Then (O happy Day!) how would false Judgment, Slander, whispering evil Things, and the greedy Inclination of propagating Calumny, be dried up at the Root?

And

* Wisd. Chap. i.

And if the Remembrance of his certain Inspection proves a Curb to our Thoughts and Words, how much more will it be to the Sinfulness of any of our Actions. Who would be found to pilfer or rob, cheat or defraud in any Sort of Dealings? Or who be guilty of the prohibited Gratifications of the Flesh, or of doing any other wicked Thing which suits their Inclination, if they in reality considered, that the omniscient Judge sees through all Privacy, Concealment, and Pretences whatsoever.

Thus should we see and enjoy a mighty Alteration for the better, if Men would always live under the Power of this Persuasion, and in the regular Practice of this Duty, of *setting God always before them*. This is the first blessed Effect, and exceeding great and happy Advantage that presents itself from this Practice, *viz.* That it most mightily helps to prevent Sin in our Thoughts, Words, and Actions; which is enough to endear it to our Perusal, and recommend it to our daily Practice.

There are several other Advantages, which I shall but just mention, and recommend to your own Thoughts to expatiate upon. As,

Secondly, The Consideration of the Presence of God will be serviceable likewise to animate us to regular Duty. How cordial and reviving are the Thoughts that he who has set us to work, and promised the Reward, is all the while present to inspect our honest and willing Endeavours? Does not every Servant quicken his Diligence, when under the Eye of his Master? So, did we reflect that our Master in Heaven looks on and marks every Conflict and Resistance of Temptation; and that every secret Virtue, done only to be seen of him, to have none but him and our Conscience for Witness to, will have an ample, an open and a resplendent Reward from him, *who seeth in Secret*; this would greatly invigorate our Obedience, and have

have a blessed Influence to further all Well-doing.—That he forgets not one *Work or Labour of Love that is done for his Sake*; that he does most accurately observe every single Endeavour, and faithfully records it to our Advantage, is a most inviting Scene to act upon.—Did we but retain a lively Sense of this cheering Truth, with what Care should we demean, and with what Zeal acquit ourselves well?

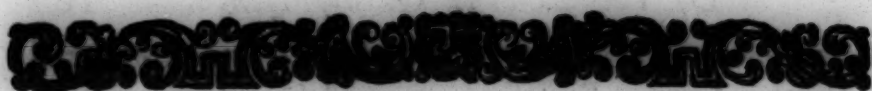
Thirdly, The Consideration of God's continual Presence is of most excellent Use to administer Comfort and Consolation to the Righteous in all the incident Afflictions or Oppressions which they may undergo here. For when any of us are in this Case, had we no Protector to fly to, no Judge to offer up our Complaint, and lay our Grievance before, our Condition would be very desperate and truly disconsolate. But since the supreme Governor is always present to see our Wrongs, and count our Tears, and is a ready Help in Time of Need; and since we have continual Opportunity of Access unto him, to lay open our Grievances and Wants, and tell him of every Trouble; the Thoughts of such an Almighty Friend should greatly rejoice the most friendless Person, that we have him to fly to when all the World forsakes us, who will vindicate our Cause, and redress our Wrongs in his good Time.

We shall further be blessed in our Deed, by setting him always before us in all considerable Occurrences of our Life, as the wise Disposer of all Events; imploring his Aid and Blessing in all our Enterprizes; and acknowledging his Favour in every Success, in any Escape, in all Deliverances, and being very thankful for all his Mercies.

We shall do well likewise in setting God and his *Christ* before us always, as they are the prescribed Patterns we are to imitate in general Benevo-

nevolence and particular Forgiveness, in universal Truth, Love, Beneficence, and Kindness, as far as we are able to copy.

Lastly, and to conclude this fruitful Argument, the Practice of this Duty would teach us to regulate our Deportment with the greater Reverence, when we are assembled together in his more immediate Presence : That whenever we come here to worship in his Service, we may do it heartily as unto God, and not unto Men. This would cause our Hearts and Lips to go together, and say the same Thing, and utter an attentive *Amen*. This would keep us devout in our Closet, and no less sincerely so at Church : We should not dare to rush into his sacred Presence, without a Thought whom we are appearing before. Did we consider that God perfectly knows the real Inducements that bring every one of us to Church, whether out of Curiosity, formal Custom of coming to this Place on *Sundays*, or whether to be seen of Men, to maintain, or regain their Esteem, or for worse Purposes ; or else, as we ought in Duty, to worship the Lord, and be instructed out of his holy Word ; we should repent of all bad Purposes, and come with none but good and religious ones here. And may we all depart with this Resolution, and cherish this Truth, which we have this Day been reminded of with our outward Ears, that it may fructify unto all Virtue, and preserve us from such Sin. And let us beseech God, that *as the Rain cometh down from Heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the Earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud ;* so he would grant that the Seed of this Doctrinē may henceforth shoot up and prosper in our Lives and Conversations, for the Sake of *Jesus Christ*.



S E R M O N

The Eleventh.

*Our Saviour's admirable Dissuasive
from Over-Carefulness, illustrated
from his own divine Arguments.*

M A T T. vi. 34.

Take therefore no Thought for To-morrow.

THESE Words are the admonitory Result and edifying Conclusion of several preceding Arguments, which the Mouth of Divine Wisdom makes use of in this Chapter to evince that careful Foolishness of Mens being too eager in their Pursuits, and over-solicitous in their Concerns about the Things of this World. Our blessed Lord abounds in divine Reasoning, and labours in his Arguments to convince us from Variety of obvious Consideration; well-knowing how very backward even we his Followers are to consider it duly, and be persuaded from it in good earnest. You find him infering this same Lesson no less than three Times, ch. xxv. ver. 21. and here in the Text, that we might be sure not to overlook a Caution of that Consequence
to

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to our Happiness both in this and the next Life. For as much as the Neglect of this must needs be confessed by us all, to be the principal, the easily besetting Occasion of all our spiritual Misfortunes, the Loss of our Innocence, the Source of our Errors, Uneasiness, and Disquietude here, and of our Misery hereafter.—For after all our Lord's most incomparable Dissuasion, our own Convictions to the contrary, and our professed Hopes of better Things, are we not (who can deny it!) still guilty of being excessively mindful of earthly Things? Christians as we call ourselves, are we not nevertheless extremely busy in taking Care of every Thing more than our great and high Concernment? We generally lavish out our Desires, Pains, and Prudence so very much upon the other, suffering our Love, our Hope, our Fear to be immoderately engrossed, that we have scarce any of those Affections to spare, or not enough to accomplish the Things of Salvation, which our Saviour came into the World to call and quicken us to: And by what other Method did he call us to that Care, but by calling us off, and detaching us more and more from the other? The little Solitude we ordinarily put in Practice for the Security of the one in Comparison of the other, evidently shews how disposed we are to trust spiritual Concernments altogether to God's Care, to excuse ourselves of what is incumbent upon our own to make good: But the Conveniences, nay Superfluities, for the World, we prize so highly, that we trust God as little as may be with them, by taking so much superfluous Care upon ourselves, and leaving so little to him, as if we ourselves, exclusive of him, were sufficient for them. We officiously seem to act as if we would save his Concern, and exempt him from any Superintendence, by labouring ourselves so anxiously after them as we generally do: All the Time irreligious-
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ly forgetting or mistrusting that Divine Providence, which we acknowledge, in the Theory of our Belief, to rule over all, and to be able to controul every single Counsel, as well as the Total of our Endeavours about the Matter. This is the great Wickedness and Wretchedness of the Wisdom of this World, which makes the Children thereof so careful about many Things. This exceeding great and preposterous Folly our Lord most admirably exposes in several Views, and earnestly sums up all in this reiterated Admonition, *Take no Thought, &c.* It ought accordingly to be my Business upon these Words to inculcate the same, from the same Arguments he divinely makes use of.—This I propose to do, after I have

I. Briefly explained the Meaning of this Prohibition.

For tho' our Lord's Words are general and absolute, as are those of his Apostle, *Be careful for nothing* ; yet neither the one nor the other can be understood to exclude all Manner of Care and Providence for To-morrow, or Provision before-hand, or proper Labour after earthly Conveniences. Such a Latitude is directly contrary to our other Duty, and to several express Commands in other Places, as we are Members of Society ; to as many as require Industry, and oblige to labour diligently in that State of Life in which it has pleased God to call us ; to as many as condemn Sloth and Negligence in Business ; and to those that engage us to provide for our Household, as well as our Souls.

Our honest Pains and moderate Thoughtfulness are most certainly the appointed Means to which the divine Blessing is promised ; and it is never to be looked for but in the Application of human Diligence. That sort of easy Care being insisted upon

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as good for us in many Respects, whilst the Care of Diffidence is forbid as an Evil and a Thorn to us in every Situation of Life. As long as our proportionate Pains and pious Reliance upon God are undoubtedly required to go jointly Hand in Hand; for any to presume upon him without the previous Application of the Means in our Power, is no less than a tempting God, and requiring Miracles at his Hands. On the contrary, to presume wholly upon, and confide entirely in Second Causes, without his Concurrence, is the Impiety of Atheism, or that sort of Deism, which disclaims his Providence, and discharges our Dependance thereon. Provided therefore, that our Carefulness does not exceed our Trust, nor our Trust exclude our Endeavours, the Labour of the Hand, the Sweat of the Brow, and the Contrivance of the Head in all good Œconomy, for Things honest, needful, and convenient for this Life, may go on and prosper, this Precept notwithstanding. The Cares of this Life, and of Religion, may even further one the other, and secure the Promise of both Lives, this and the future, provided they are rightly regulated in proper Deference and Subordination, and proportioned according to the reasonable Preference and Value of the Things they are employed about.

Consequently, such Cares only fall under the Prohibition of the Text, as bring Anxiety to the Heart of Man, fill him with Torment, and rack him with restless Concern. So the Original implies, and puts the Difference. Not bare Care and taking Thought, but taking Thought with such a Care as includes an impatient Solitude, such as may harass and distract the thoughtful Mind with Fears of Disappointment, and insatiable Projects of getting and encreasing: Such carking Contrivance as proceeds from filthy Lucre and pernicious Avarice, and those boundless Stretches and Perplexities of Heart

Heart which accompany worldly Ambition : All those inordinate Pursuits after Mammon as quite steal away the Heart from God and his Service, fixing its Aims and centering its Happiness wholly in the Attainments of Things below, to the Neglect of those that are Eternal ; or, with such a cold Indifference towards them, as will be sure to be ineffectual : Such as argues a Want of Faith in the Governor of the World, and a Distrust in his Power and Promise, to provide Things needful and convenient for us *Men*, who has been so abundant in his Provisions for all other inferior living Creatures : And if there are any that engender a querulous repining Temper at their own Allotment, and an envious one at others supposed better Circumstances ; if there are any that are unsatisfiable, ever in quest after Superfluities, after a *little more* ; tho' that Little has no Bounds of Dimension, and that More no other End or Stop but that of Life : Such Cares, lastly, as are full of Apprehension for imaginary, future Evils, and Wants that are a great Way off, uncertain in themselves whether they shall come to pass, and with respect to us, uncertain whether we shall live to see them : Doubly foolish indeed is Anxiety about the Event and Success of Things when entirely fruitless, and can serve to no Manner of Purpose but to disquiet ourselves in vain. All these, and such like, are the guilty Excesses and Irregularities of our Concern about worldly Things ; they are utter Inconsistencies with the Life of a true Christian, as well as our present Ease and Tranquility ; and therefore stand corrected, and strictly excluded from our Thoughts by these Words of our heavenly Master, who arraigns and condemns them under three Articles ; of Thoughtlessness ; of Absurdity ; and of gross Impiety.

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Let us now go on then, if you please, to his most admirable Reasonings to this Purpose, comprized as we find them between the 24th Verses and my Text, and the most Worldly-minded must yield himself convinced, and will, as I hope, follow his own Convictions in wiser Measures for the Future.

I. The first Argument for abating immoderate Care, even for the *Necessaries* of Life, such as Food and Raiment, concludes *à Fortiori, i. e.* from the Less to the Greater ; for granting *these* the first Rank of worldly Things which claim our Carefulness, and best justify it ; *over-eager* and distrustful Endeavours after *these* are nevertheless very foolish, and vastly inconsiderate. Because, as he argues, *is not Life more than Meat, and the Body more than Raiment ?*——If we have already received and experienced the greater Instances of divine Care, in receiving Life and Body from the Bounty of our Creator, we may certainly depend upon it, that his Providence will not be wanting in the *lesser*. The Maker, who brings into Being, stands obliged to Maintenance and Preservation of that same Being : If he thought it worth the Making, (who never made any Thing in vain) he will judge it worth preserving for so long as was intended. Was God then so-kind, so great in Power and Wisdom to give Life to, and present us with a Body wonderfully, fashioned and divinely animated ? Can HE, think we, be unable ; can HE be supposed unwilling ; or can HE possibly be so defective, so cruel, as not to give Food also to the one, and Raiment to the other ?

II. Another Consideration to awaken us into an Assurance of the divine Superintendance over us for these Things, is taken from the Fowls of the Air, and Lillies of the Field ; one secured of Food,

the other of Raiment. And do we not see the former live from Day to Day, both Summer and Winter, without Thought or Care? They *neither sow nor reap*, yet the Maker of them, and of us, provides for them full as well as if they did; they *neither build nor hire Barns*, yet they are as little subject to Want as we, with all our Cares in sowing that we may reap, and reaping that we may lay up for Store. We feed the Fowls about our Houses, whilst those which are independant of Man, and fly wild in the Firmament of Heaven, are commonly as well provided for, and live longer Lives. They sing forth their Thanks and Joy for the present, without troubling their Heads where they shall find their next Meal: The next Day comes, they go out from their Resting-places, and seek their Meat from God, their never-failing Friend and Provider; and those daily Pensioners find a Table as plentiful as before, and fare every Day to their Content. And thus they live, a Reproach indeed to many Men; to whom it would be better they had been made without Reason, or with as little Portion of it as Birds, rather than have so much to so great Abuse, or so mean an Use, as only to serve them to encrease their Vexations, to distrust God, and murmur at their Maker.—

Are ye not of much more Value than a Sparrow, says our Lord! Ye value that at half a Farthing; what Value then do ye not set upon yourselves, Children of Men, as the Lords of this sublunary Creation? How can it once enter into your Heads, that God will go on to take such abundant Care for those Appurtenances, and be short in providing for Man the Principal; for you, whom he has indeed made their Master? Why so strangely overseen, as to over-prize them in the divine *Provision*, and under-rate yourselves so low!—If the Raven, upon his Crying, finds wherewith to assuage his Hunger,

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Hunger, and fears no Lack ; shall we be so void of Thought as to distrust a Supply of what is needful from the Hands of so tender a Father, who loves us more than any Mother her Sucking-Child, who carries us about in the Arms of his Providence, and daily nourishes us with his good Things, and suffers nothing without his Permission to hurt any of us in any Respect ? Think therefore sometimes of the Fowls of the Air, which you see so often, and reflect that you are much better than they in the Regards of Heaven ; and then you cannot fail of being much more assured of Sustenance for *your* Life, from that Providence which so plentifully and daily interests itself for them.

And *Why*, in the next Place, *take ye Thought for Raiment ? Consider the Lillies of the Field, how they grow ; they toil not, neither do they spin.* Who ever saw any of their Wheels, or Distaffs, Looms, or Dying Offices ? Yet what elegant and polite Sutes of Cloathing have they, most exactly fitted to their Bodies, leaving the Effect of Admiration upon the Beholders and Passers-by, in regard to the Beauty of their Proportion, and the Curiosity of their Colouring and Variety ! Nay, put the Question right, can all the Art, or Cost, or Labour of the City Artificers, ever come up to those Country Beauties ? Forasmuch as those negative Glories surpass *Solomon* in all his Royah, all his artificial Glory, upon the highest Holiday : His Wardrobe had nothing to compare, nothing to shew so truly Beauteous, and perfectly well dressed as they : Nor can the greatest Monarch with all the Wealth and Toil of his Subjects ; ever furnish out such Drapery, as God in his ordinary providential Goodness bestows upon the Tulips and Flowers of the Field. — Wherefore, if this bounteous Giver of all Things is yearly and customarily pleased

thus to habit and adorn the Flowers of so low a Price, and so short Continuance, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye Sons of Men, who excel so much in Rank and Order, in Fabrick and Constitution, as to bear the Image of your very Maker and Provider? Your Bodies more wonderful and fearfully made; your Duration everlasting; your Well-Being so dearly delighted in by him that he sent his only Son into this World to live and die for your very Sakes! Shall we *Men*, can we *Christians* then be so thoughtless and degenerate, so absurd in Reasoning and Faith, as to disbelieve or suspect his Kindness and Willingness to furnish out common Materials to *our* common Care and wholesome Labour upon them? They even court our Acceptance from his Hands. For has he not given the Earth to the Children of Men; and has he not in *that* Gift provided all the Materials for human Food, Physick, Clothing and Dwelling? and left them all to Man's various Faculty and Genius to extract, compose, and dispose them, according to his variable Fashion and Invention?

Surely, O God! if thou so much regardest the lowest Parts of this Creation, thine own Image, thine Offspring, Man, thy last and chiefest Work, we may be certain in Reason, and no less confident in Faith, must necessarily be the peculiar, yea, the darling Object of thy Care:—For any of us, therefore, who have expresse Promises added to such visible Instances of his universal Providence, to doubt of the Supplies of such Necessaries, does certainly argue that Diffidence, if not Disbelief in God; that Littleness of Mind and Reason (which in this Case is the same Thing as Littleness of Faith), and such a Proneness to Infidelity, as justifies our Lord's Expostulation, *Ob ye of little Faith!*

III. Another Reason succeeds, and that a double one, why we should repose more of our Thoughts
for

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for To-morrow upon God. It is, *That he is our heavenly Father*; and that he *knows that we have Need of these necessary Things*. If he is our *Father*, that dear Appellation, that careful Name should sweeten our Pains-taking, and convert it to Chearfulness and a Kind of Play: For he is none of your careless extravagant Sort of Parents, who do not care what becomes of their Offspring, so they live well themselves; but he ever lives both the wisest and the ablest to provide for us. And what greatly strengthens the Argument further, is, that he *knows* that we have need of these Things. Now for a Father both to know, and to be able to supply his Children's Wants, and not do it, all the World knows is such a Reflection, as every ordinary Parent takes care to prevent. Who then questions God's exact Knowledge of our Wants? And if there is, as there ought to be, no Doubt remaining with any of us, as to that, have we not a perfect Security, that we shall all have what is fitting of that Sort? We may as well suspect God is not, or is not our *Father which is in Heaven*, as that he will not supply such Kind of Wants: But let me put the Question; Can any conceive any other Reason, why he made us so indigent of those Things, but merely because he would have it as conspicuous to our Reason as the Sun is to our Senses, that he is so fatherly and so beneficent, as never to suffer us to want them? And is there any Condition more reasonable under the Sun, than that we become sensible that we depend upon him for them, and confess our Relation, that he is our Father in the highest Perfection of that Title, and we are his Children in every Dependance and Duty? And as long as we are mindful of that Relation, and the Duty resulting from it, we may securely repose ourselves on him for the other. *W*ho more towards providing the Event we desire than

If therefore our Children spend their Time cheerfully, without Thought or Forecast what shall become of them in the World, because they place their Confidence in their Father's Goodness and Knowledge how to provide for them; Why do we labour and drudge, plot and contrive at that intolerable anxious Rate, as if we had no Father to care for us? Or why disquiet our Minds with foreboding Concern what shall become of them; as if that Father was to die with our Person, or as if God was not like to live to be the same good indulgent Parent to them hereafter, as to us now?

Notwithstanding this, we go on to take such abundant Care and Thoughtfulness upon ourselves, as if we were all-sufficient for the making our own and our Children's Fortune after us. We ask not Counsel of God, and lightly regard his Concurrence as an indifferent Thing, leaning on our own Understanding, and relying upon our own Arm to help us. But what other is this Neglect of God, and of the proper Means, as they are necessarily dependent upon him for Success, than a ready Way to make him abandon us? As there is no Method to make an Interest in him like trusting and depending on him in the Paths of our Duty; so to mistrust and suspect his Care, is the ready Way to disoblige and lose him from being either our Father or Friend, and together with him all the Success of our Designs likewise.

For that is, 4thly, why we should depend less upon our own Care, and more upon God's; because, as our Lord urges most convincingly, *Which of you by taking Thought can add one Cubit more to his Stature?* If we cannot add one Moment to our Lives, nor an Inch to our Stature, how much less will our own Solitude be able to preserve the Whole? For our Care and Toil, after all, can do no more towards procuring the Event we design, than

than it can be effectual in adding an Inch of Height to our Stature whilst we are growing. In that Case we are to eat and drink and take care of our Health, and leave the rest to God so in our Labours we must pursue the proper Means, and he gives the Success in as imperceptible a Manner as the Bones grow, the Muscles dilate, and the Body becomes larger.

This I say with respect to that Signification of the Word *ἡλικία*, which our Translators have pitched upon, viz. *Stature*. But as that Word as well signifies *Age* in other Authors, and is so translated *Job* ix. 21. and *Heb.* xi. 11. it seems to me to be the justest Sense and Idea that ought to have been received here. Because *first*, grown People do not ordinarily trouble their Head about the Height of their Stature; they neither eat, nor drink, nor clothe, with a Prospect of growing taller. To a careful Man of full Growth an Addition of a Cubit to his Stature is no desirable Thing; if not desired, it could be no Disappointment to their Solitude to go without it; and if no Disappointment, no Confutation of the Vanity of such caring, which ought not to be suspected of any Argument from the wisest of all Teachers. *Secondly*, Men daily provide Meat, and Drink, and Clothes, in order to prolong their Days; and fain would we all (whatever we pretend) live long. And whereas a Span is made the Measure of Man's Age in Scripture Language, worldly Men, not contented with that Dimension, would be for lengthening it out to a Cubit: But after all, the most intense Care can never accomplish that; and therefore I take the Justness of our Saviour's Argument to lie in this, seeing you cannot compass

“ your Ends by your Means, even shorten and
“ contract your Cares to the Proportion of the End,

“and these short Cares will be fittest for a short
“uncertain Life.”

But to return; it is the usual Proceeding of divine Providence to permit natural Causes to work their natural Effects, according to the Powers they are endowed with: And also for Man to act and make choice of those Causes according to his Knowledge of them, which is ever defective, and according also to his Liberty and Freedom, which is ever intire to him. Still the supreme Regent of all human Affairs refers to himself the Power of altering and suspending, of influencing and directing as he sees best. We are to expect the Success from our Industry, and his Blessing conjointly, and must accordingly ply the one as the prescribed Means, and the indispensable Condition of receiving the other. But though God governs by those Rules, he is still Master of them; he does not always tie himself to prosper and succeed our Endeavours; but oftentimes the most likely Means that could be devised, are unaccountably baffled and disappointed of the expected Success. This God does to convince vain Man of his own Insufficiency to accomplish what he sets his Heart upon; and of the Necessity of resting our main Dependance upon him; and of our correspondent Duty of trusting in and applying to him in all our Undertakings; and of firmly believing that his Blessing and Providence is more to the Event than all our own Endeavours: Forasmuch as he can, and does sometimes prosper unlikely Methods, as well as render the most probable unprosperous and abortive.

And thus the general Maxims of Scripture, which is the Mind of God to Man concerning these Things, run to our reading, and are confirmed by the History of the World and our own Experience.
It is not in Man that walketh to direct his Steps, but
God

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God bringeth every Thing to pass ; it is but lost Labour that we haste to rise early, and take Rest, and eat the Bread of Carefulness. One would think that Pains-taking, intent Forecast, and diligent watching Opportunities, was the sure and infallible Way to Riches : Yet in Abatement of this, we are assured, that something is still wanting, and that it is in Fact the *Blessing of the Lord that maketh rich.* There are that sow much yet bring in but little ; that eat and have not enough ; that drink but are not satisfied ; that are clothed but not warm ; that earn Wages but put them into a Bag with Holes. How frequent is it for him to give Riches, and not the Power of enjoying them ? Who is not conscious of the Observation of the wise Man, concerning those who lay up Riches ; for what do they lay them up ? Not for their Happiness, but their Hurt ; which is in Truth, the Defeazance and the Reverse of Riches, and turns all back again into Poverty ; a visible Blast, and we daily see it, from above, upon the Infidel beneath ; if not upon his setting out, yet upon the Conclusion of his Projects. Thus we are assured by a divine Writer : *There is that maketh himself rich, yet hath nothing ; there is that waxeth rich by Weariness and Pinching, and this is the Portion of his Reward : Whereas he saith I have found Rest, and will eat continually of my Goods ; yet he knoweth not what Time will come upon him, and that he must die, and leave these Things for others.*

Anxiety, you see, may do Hurt, as it certainly does, in Body and Mind, but can do no Good to either ; it may be said to do the Worldling that Piece of foolish Service, to impair his Health and shorten his Days, by making him a Prey to his own sordid Carking, whilst his earthly-minded Soul is rent asunder with the distracting Solitudes of getting more, and of losing what he has got.

What

What possible Good can there be in it, if after we have done our very utmost, the Disposal is still in God, and the Event must still come from him? Something of every Affair is in our Province, something in his; but for us to think of altering what is in his, is as foolish as to neglect what is in ours. This therefore should be a prevalent Dissuasive against Over-carefulness, *viz.* the Unprofitableness of the Thing, that it cannot of itself effect the least Purpose, without the Concurrence of the great Parent and Governor of the Universe; and this should prevail also with us not to omit the due and proper Means, and engage us to do all that is in our Power, under a strict Confinement to that which is lawful and prudent, leaving the rest to God, lightening the Load of painful Cares from off our Thoughts, and putting it upon him, who has proffered so great a Share of Easement in his caring for us; and caring much better for us than we for ourselves; either by granting or delaying, or altering the Issue that we project. Let us therefore wait his good Pleasure in all Things, with quiet and resigned Minds. But further,

Fifthly, our blessed Master deborts us from the Folly of Anxiety, from the Consideration of the utter Needlessness of such Thoughts: *For the Morrow shall take Thought for the Things of itself; sufficient to each Day are the Evils thereof.* As sure as the Sun shall arise To-morrow, there is a God that careth for the Things thereof; every Day has its own Portion of Cares. We are only cotemporary with those of To-day; Why then so forward to break the Rest we might enjoy To-day, by thrusting ourselves upon To-morrow's Fatigues? Even let the God of To-morrow take care of the Things of To-morrow: We are not of To-morrow, we are of To-day; let us therefore whilst it is called *To-day*, be faithful in serving and confiding in that God,

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God, who will be our Friend To-morrow, and the next Day after that, and for evermore.

It must needs be a precipitate Folly indeed, to go about to increase a Burthen that is already heavy enough; as if there was not Plenty of Evils and Troubles in the Course of Life, and the Business of our Calling, without inviting in more, and sending out to meet them, by our Curiosity. If our Care can make no Alteration, why do we vex about it? If Evil must come, why do we anticipate, why hasten, why double it by untimely Pre-apprehension? If Good, wherefore do we spoil and deflower it by Impatience of possessing; by forestalling Expectation, which extracts out so much of its Sweets, and renders it the more tasteless, if it should ever come, when it is only in reality to be tasted? This is finely reprehended by St. James in the Person of such a Projector: *Go to now, ye that say, To-day or To-morrow we will go into such a City, and continue there a Year, and buy and sell, and get Gain; whereas ye know not what shall be on the Morrow: For what is your Life? It is even a Vapour that appeareth for a little Time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, if the Lord will, we shall live, and do this or that. But now ye rejoice in your Boastings; all such Rejoicing is Evil.* Ch. iv. 13, &c.

It is therefore Evil to pre-occupy any doubtful Good, or doubtful Evil, before it comes. But as our Lord speaks here only of Evil, and every Day has its proper Cares, Crosses, and Disappointments come along with it, sufficient to exercise our Patience and Reliance upon God, when they actually take Place; it must be very imprudent to multiply Troubles, and imbitter our present Condition by future Uncertainties; but most ridiculous of all to afflict ourselves with needless Grievances, or be so greedy of Misfortunes, as to realize

alize the Endurance of an imaginary one ; or be in Dread of that which may probably tend to our Advantage.

Ignorance of Futurity, is most certainly a blessed Short-sightedness, vouchsafed to Man from Heaven : Especially of those Evils, our Foreknowledge of which would be ineffectual to prevent them. We have a strong Appetite to be looking forwards, and to take a View of all the Losses and Disappointments that may fall to our Share : But God has graciously placed a Curtain between the present and future Time, as to those Matters, that he might not lay more upon our Patience than it is able to bear. Some Foresight he has imparted to us, and reserved the rest to himself, that he might be chiefly applied to and depended upon in all Things : He readily allows us in a prudential and submissive Use of that Sagacity which is one great Function of human Reason ; so as to be apprehensive of what may happen : For thus the *Prudent Man*, according to *Solomon*, *foreseeth the Evil and hides himself, when the Simple pass on and are punished*. One takes Warning in Time, and provides against it ; the other derides his own Danger, and resolves to be convinced by nothing but his own Destruction.——But with respect to other sort of future Evils, it is a very vain, impious Presumption, for any one's Curiosity to search into that which our heavenly Governor has, out of pure Kindness, wrapp'd up in Darkness from us.—Wherefore let none of us be adding to natural Troubles and Encumbrances of Life unseasonable Solitude and Vexation about what is to come, and may never happen. For all such Thoughts for To-morrow are disquieting ; are also absolutely superfluous, and therefore very unwise ; are distrustful of God, and therefore very sinful.

Sincerely

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Sixtly and lastly, Another Condemnation of this immoderate Carefulness is, 'because it is the Practice of Heathens and Infidels, as if they, without God, were entirely sufficient to provide for themselves ; *after all these Things do the Gentiles seek.* Such intense Cares and greedy Desires are more befitting Heathens, who have no Apprehensions of God's Providence, his good Care and Love towards Mankind ; but do not in the least become Christian People, who so well know and experience them both : It must be an impious Degeneracy in these who are *doubly* the Children of God, by Nature and by Adoption, to involve themselves in the common Spirit of a sensual World, and not behave answerable to the Expectations they have of Life and Immortality brought to Light by the Gospel. Our spiritual Thoughts should run parallel, like our immortal Spirits, with Eternity ; our Designs be laid up in another World, our chief Cares employed about an Expectation of the *Glory which shall be revealed.*—It may be tolerable for an Heathen to lose his Labour ; but it is out of all Character for a *Christian* to lose both his Labour and his Innocence in pursuit of unsatisfactory Things ; or to expect that such Uncertainties can ever afford a certain Happiness. To seek for Happiness only in the Abundance of Things that a Man possesses of this World, is to seek for it in desolate Places. Ought that, I beseech you, to be the chief Care of any People, who place their Felicity in another World, to make Provision for that Part of us which must rot in the Grave? No.—To live by Sight, and not by Faith ; to chuse by Sense, and not by Reason ; to pursue earthly Things as an End, and not as a Means ; to love them as a supreme Good ; to esteem their Possession as Things we are not able to be happy without ; to expect more from them than Vanity and Dissatisfaction ;

faction ; to contend for them with painful Anxiety, and such eager Solitude, as calls in Question our heavenly Father's Care of providing Things sufficient for us ; all this is the Reverse of our Profession, a departing from the Faith and Spirit of it, and can become none but Heathens, who have no other God but this World, nor other Good but that of Sense.

As these immoderate Cares then are an Apostacy from our Religion ; as they are needless when multiplied before the Time ; as they are unprofitable at the best, and can effect nothing without God ; and as God is our Father, and knows best what we need ; as his abundant Provision for meaner Creatures is a Demonstration he will not neglect the principal Tenants of this World ; who, as they have received their Being, have an infallible Pledge that they shall not want Sustenance for it : It is Time for us to obey our own Convictions from these irrefragable Reasonings of our Lord and Master, and dismiss those painful Follies, lighten our Burthen, and throw it upon God ; and not disappoint him of his Design of raising and refining our groveling Affections, which too much devour our Time, Thoughts, and Vigour ; to transfer our Cares to better, and set our Minds upon eternal Concernments ; and rather be getting clear off than going deeper into Entanglements, which clog and fasten down the Soul to this Earth. We are travelling to our own proper abiding Place ; where we are is not worthy the Name of *our own* : It is ours only for a short Season, for Loan, and for a transient Use : We should consider ourselves as Strangers, and know ourselves to be but Pilgrims : We ought accordingly to judge it our chief Happiness, that we have none in this World to depend upon, nor any Foundation for it, but what we raise from our Hopes of finding it in Heaven.

Let

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Let us, therefore, finally, close with our Saviour's Advice, which is the Conclusion of the whole Matter ; *to seek first the Kingdom of God and his Righteousness, and all these Things shall be added to us.* Let ours be the Care of Well-doing, and we may safely leave the rest to him ; we may lay us down and take our Rest, being under the Safeguard of him who watches over us for Good. Having dismissed all anxious Thoughts for To-morrow from our Hearts, and in the Use of our best Endeavours, assigned over ourselves and our Concerns to such safe and sure Hands, how comfortably may we negotiate the Affairs of this World, and enjoy the Fruits of our Labour ? And when these Possessions, which we have both gained and used with Innocence, fly faster and faster from us in our Decline, and the Prospect of Enjoying becomes less and less, that of another incomparably better grows greater and greater, till, at the Expiration of our Spirits, it opens into a ravishing Scene of Felicity and Glory, wherewith all those who seek first the Kingdom of God and his Righteousness in this Life, shall be for ever blessed in Life Everlasting.





S E R M O N

The Twelfth.

The Christian's peculiar Duty.

M A T T. vi. ~~34~~. 44

But I say unto you, Love your Enemies.

TH E S E Words are addressed to a *Jewish* Audience, who had constantly before been taught by the *Scribes* and *Pharisees*, that it was their Duty to love only their Neighbour, and hate their Enemy. Our blessed Lord, through this whole divine Sermon, bends himself to undeceive the People with respect to those received Doctrines which imposed upon their Judgment, and misguided their Practice, by correcting the erroneous Glosses of their corrupt Teachers, and restoring the Laws and Statutes of *Moses* to their true Scope and Meaning; and where he finds them not expressive enough, or any Way deficient, (for they were given that People in the Way of Rudiments only, to educate and prepare them for more glorious and perfect Discoveries that were to follow,) he adds new Motives to enforce, or lays down new Rules, to explain them. This of my Text is an eminent Instance, *Ye have heard*
it

it has been said, you shall love your Neighbour and hate your Enemy.

If some question whether private Revenge was forbid the *Jews*, it seems to be resolvable in the Affirmative from *Lev. xix. 17, 18. Thou shalt not hate thy Brother in thy Heart; thou shalt not avenge nor bear any Grudge against the Children of thy People.* But the narrow-minded *Pharisees* contracting the Notion of Brother and Neighbour to their own peculiar Nation and Religion, by an unmerciful Construction excluded the Rest of the World from any Title to their Charity; and since the Command of God for utterly destroying the seven wicked Nations devoted to Destruction, which inhabited and encompassed the Land of *Canaan*; they seem to have inherited an intestine inveterate Hatred against all the People who were Aliens to the Commonwealth of *Israel*: And accordingly were so far from thinking them worthy of human Treatment, that some *Roman Authors* * represent them such Haters of the Rest of Mankind, that they reckoned it a Piece of Merit to destroy them. This we may judge of them, and their Law. Tho' it is doubted whether our Lord superadded any Thing new, which was not before the true Meaning and Interpretation of the Moral Law; it is certain, he delivered Precepts far transcending the temporary permissive Laws of *Moses*, occasionally indulged them for *the Hardness of their Heart*:

* *Juvenal* accuses them, that they would not shew a Stranger the Way, nor give him a Draught of Water, if he was not of their Religion. *Tacitus* tells us that they had *Adversus omnes hostile odium*: Hist. Lib. v. c. 4, 5. &c. Dr. *Cave* says, They received a radicate and inveterate Hatred against the *Gentiles*; nor did the *Gentiles*, for that Reason, less scorn and deride them, stopping their Noses, and abhorring the very Sight of them, if they chanced to meet them; looking on them as unfriendly People, and Enemies to all Nations. *Prim. Christianity, Part II. p. 303.*

And granting Revenge against private Enemies was prohibited the *Jews* amongst one another ; yet this Precept of Forgiving so oft, of loving them, returning Good for Evil, and overcoming the latter with the former, carries the Matter a great deal higher, and may well be called a new and peculiar Command of the Gospel ; our Saviour himself styling it so ; *a new Command give I unto you, that you love one another.* Joh. xiii. 34.

It was *new* to the World in respect to the Extent of its Object, which is no less than *universal* Mankind : For the *Jews*, in their narrow stingy Charity, had limited and engrossed all the Love of respecting their Neighbour to their own Sect and Religion, and none besides was to receive any Benefit from it. It was a current Doctrine of their Teachers, though a scandalous false Gloss upon the Text, that they were at Liberty ; that it was the Peoples Duty to hate their Enemies ; and no question it was as current in the Practice of that perverse Generation.

New it was in regard also of the sublime Pitch it carried the Duty up to ; for it is not enough to answer our Christian Engagements to cease from Cursing and Reproaching those that curse or reproach us, but we must actually return the contrary Good to every Evil that is done us ; Blessing for Curses, civil Language for uncivil, Kindness and Good-will for Malice and Hatred : Even those that offend of malicious Wickedness, must provoke only to the Love of good Works ; to do all the Services we are able, or they capable of receiving ; and when we can do no more, to pray for them, and engage Omnipotence in their Favour.

New likewise, in the Degree of Practice, obliging even the laying down our Lives for the Brethren ; *new*, in having Christ's most perfect Example for us to copy after ; *new* in regard to the clear

clear Motives of another Life to come, whereinto also it is a Qualification of our Entry.

If we look into the Heathen World, antient or modern, the Defect of Revelation in nothing more appears than in their Ignorance or Uncertainty of this Duty ; which verifies that Reproach of St. *John*, 1 Epistle, ch. ii. ver. 11. upon Christians, called *Children of Light*, and of the Day : *He who hateth his Brother is STILL in Darknefs, and walketh in Darknefs.*— The present savage *Indians* are said by Travellers to be universally adicted to wreck their Vengeance, and retaliate Injuries on those that offer them : Such Retributions being indeed, among the more uncultivated of them, a wild kind of Justice, which every one might think he had a natural Right to dispense immediately to the Offender. The *Brazilians* account of it as the highest Virtue to destroy and hurt their Enemies by all the Ways they can ; and for this Reason they are said to eat them with a particular Relish, whilst they eat no other human Flesh ; so sweet a Morsel is Revenge ! And it is this very false Notion of Virtue that is the great Obstruction against receiving Christianity among them in particular.

If we consult the antient heathen Philosophers, who most cultivated the Light of Reason, some of them, it is true, have left in Writing juster Notions, and better Advice for our Deportment under Injuries ; but then their fluctuating Uncertainty is enough to stagger us ; for they differed as well from themselves, as from one another about it. If some have made forgiving Injuries the Mark of a great Mind, and branded Revenge as an Indication of a little effeminate Temper, and celebrated Emperors and great Commanders for their Clemency in pardoning Enemies ; or, if they recommend this Virtue from the Serenity, Delight and Satisfaction

faction it fills the Mind with, compared with the broiling Disquietude attending the contrary Disposition ; yet others have made Revenge the genuine Effect of Fortitude ; * and patient enduring Wrong they utterly discard as Pusillanimity and Mean-Spiritedness. The *Roman* Orator †, to name no more, in his Offices, lays this down for the Fundamental Rule of Justice, that no Man *do another any Injury*, (but then it is with this subverting Exception) *unless he is provoked to it by one received* : The *Unless* spoils all, and gives the full Loose to Revenge ; for who ever thought of Revenge unprovoked ?

In Truth, the Philosophers in this Matter seem to have writ according to their own respective Constitutions, and the Treatment they met with in the World ; accordingly their Doctrines had Success upon their Readers just as they brought Temper and Dispositions to it ; a resenting cholerick Person finding enough to justify his Revenge, as well as the generous and good-natured Man to encourage and direct him to pass by a Provocation.-- So that, instead of prescribing a certain uniform Rule, it seemed to be at most a disputable Question, and no Body knew which was the right Side. From this Uncertainty we may fairly conclude, that this great Duty is not to be deduced from any fixed Principles of corrupt Nature, or improved Reason, nor any full and steady State of it to be depended upon, any where but from the last and new Revelation of *Jesus Christ*, who came to lighten the *Gentiles*, and perfect the Law of *Moses* : Therefore,

* *Aristotle*, Lib. 4. *Eth.* reckons Revenge in his Catalogue of Virtues.

† *Justiciae primum munus est ne cui quis noceat nisi laesus injuria.* *Cic. Off. Lib. I.*

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* in the New Testament it is abundantly recommended with Variety of Arguments, Parables, and convincing Reasons explaining one the other; all which sufficiently supposes too the Difficulty of the Duty, if we did not enough feel it.—For it must be confessed and lamented, both that there is a sturdy Kind of Reluctancy in Flesh and Blood against an entire Compliance to it; and that this is one of the hard Sayings of our Master, which it would fain be dispensed from. And in the parallel Place to the Text, *Luke xvii. 4.* the Disciples beg of our Lord *to encrease their Faith* upon mention of it; implying that we must be good Proficients in Christianity before we can put it in full Practice.—And forasmuch as some have imagined that these distinguishing Lines of Christianity are an heroick Strain, given rather to be admired or observed by those that pleased, than to be practised by *all*; in Discourfing of this Duty it may be proper, in order to rectify our Mistakes in judging of our Obedience,

I. To state the just Meaning and Extent of this Command, how far it indispensably obliges.

II. And then I shall endeavour to evince the Reasonableness of our Obedience, that none may think themselves exempt, and that all may be persuaded to comply with it.

I. In stating the Meaning and Degree of this *Love*, we are commanded to shew our *Enemy*, we may assert, it is not enough to return him good

* *Athenagoras*, one of the antient Apologists, principally makes use of this Argument to prove the Divinity of the Christian Religion; challenges the great Masters of Reason and Learning, among the Heathens, to produce any, either of themselves, or their Disciples, of so pure and excellent a Temper, as could, instead of hating, love their Enemies. *Cavi's Prim. Cbr.*

Words only, or pacify him with peaceful Compliments ; for this may be, and is but too oft' found in Fact, to be a refined and more effectual Way to undermine him, and work his Ruin ; for Friendship and Reconciliation must first be pretended and believed too, before Malice can have its Ends ; because there is no-body but confides in a Friend, whilst all are upon their Guard against an open Enemy *. But the Scripture, or the Christian Honesty, is a Stranger to this polite Art of Deceiving. St. John utterly prohibits all such Dissembling. 1 John iii. 18. *Let us, says he, not love in Word, neither in Tongue, but in Deed, and in Truth.*

Nor is it sufficient to do him one or two kind Offices, without sincerely intending his Good ; for this is a Stratagem used by some to draw their Enemy into their Power and Confidence, in order to undo him securely afterwards ; but we ought to design him all the Good we can do, and chearfully do all that our Abilities, with Convenience to ourselves, will permit to answer his Wants. — So St. Peter, 1 Ep. i. 22. bids us *love with a pure Heart fervently, and with Love unfeigned.*

Neither fulfil we this Precept of Loving and Forgiving our Enemy, by fairly representing, or even praising some particular Worth and Excellency in him ; because this we are bound to in regard to Truth and Justice, as oft as we speak of his Character : But Love and Charity is somewhat more than Justice ; for it inclines us moreover to conceal the Faults or Blemishes we know of him, (and there is none without their Share) and candidly puts the best Construction upon doubtful Actions. Nor do we come up to this Rule by for-

* It was wittily said by one, " We read that we are commanded to forgive our Enemies, but no where, that we are bid to forgive our Friends."

giving an offending Brother once or twice, may be after he has asked our Pardon: For *Matth. xviii. 22.* the same divine Mouth expressly tells us, we must forgive *seven Times seven*, if he should so oft trespass against us. —How ill, therefore, do some foreign Maxims, current in certain Christian Countries, become the Disciples of *Christ*; *To forgive once, shews a good Catholick, but a second Time a Fool*; and, *if a Man wrong me once, God forgive him, but if he do it a second Time, God forgive me?*

Now, whether our Enemy asks Forgiveness or not, we are bound nevertheless to forgive him; (his not doing his Duty being no Excuse for my neglecting mine): Forgive him, *i. e.* discharge our Minds of all Manner of Spite and Prejudice against him, and be ready to do him any real wanted Kindness in our Power, as if he had never provoked us; and this Disposition we must put on before the Sun goes down, and we offer up our Evening Sacrifice; otherwise our Prayers will be defeated of the Pardon they are suing out for our own daily Sins.—But if our Enemy relents, is sorry, and begs our Pardon, then we ought also, if he is fit for our Friendship, or had a Place in it formerly, to restore him to the usual Confidence, and treat him with the Endearments of Affection. Thus the Revenge which *Esau* entertained against his Brother *Jacob*, was converted into the kindest Endearments after Reconciliation; *Jacob's* smooth Temper and Carriage (for he was smother by Nature than the other) soon softened the Roughness of his Brother, and disarmed him of all his fierce and cruel Purposes.

Nor, lastly, is the Obligation of this Command entirely satisfied, by barely forgiving, putting up a Wrong or ill Turn done, and not revenging it: This may shew a Generosity or Greatness

ness of Mind, and Goodness of Nature (which yet I fear is as far as most People go.) But the Precept, as well as the Example of our Master, directs more to be done, if we would be such Disciples as pretend to live up to his Instruction ; which tells us (in the very same Verse of my Text) the true Manner of loving and forgiving our Enemy, is not only to pass over a malicious Injury with Neglect or Forgetfulness, but positively *to bless those that curse us, do good to those that hate us, and pray for those who despitefully use us and persecute us.* No rejoicing when he falleth ; no wishing any Calamity to him ; but we are to bless and pray for him, even while he is cursing us.

This, moreover, demonstrates the Universality of the Duty : For who can pretend to be so destitute of Power and Ability, as not to be able to bestow this lowest Benefaction of good Wishes and Prayers upon his Adversary ? But, if Providence has given us the Means and Opportunities of redressing his Needs, and relieving his necessary Occasions, we are obliged to perform substantial Acts of Kindness. The Law enjoined the *Jews* this to the Beast of their Enemy, as oft' as they found it in Distress ; and not less, to be sure, was due to the Owner in the like distressed Circumstances ; and therefore it is, we are expressly commanded, *Rom. xii. 2. If thine Enemy hunger, feed him ; if he thirst, give him Drink :* That is, if it lies in your Way to preserve his Life, his Reputation, or promote his Welfare, though he has towards you endeavoured the Damage and Ruin of each of these, submit to it as your indispensable Duty ; and as the positive Condition on which your own Forgiveness depends ; or embrace it for the Pleasure the Reflection yields, after doing such undeserved Favours.

This

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This, with various other Motives, will be more fitly displayed under my second general Head ; for we are now previously considering and rectifying a few Errors that Men are apt to run into when they judge of the Sincerity of their Practice with regard to this Rule : And to give all due Latitude, I shall likewise instance wherein it cannot be supposed to oblige.

Now, if bare forgiving an Enemy his injurious Usage of me, and freeing and calming my Mind from spiteful Thoughts against him, is not the adequate Completion of this Christian Law, (as has been shewn) they certainly fall short even of sincere Forgiveness, who think they forgive as far as is required, if forbearing personal Returns, they remit their Adversary to the Chastisement of the Law ; which, tho' a necessary and impartial Punisher of Wrongs, yet by Reason of its Charges and Vexations, is but too often appealed to as a ruinous Instrument of Revenge. What miserable inconsistent Satisfaction do some take to see their Antagonist reduced, though with almost equal Damage to themselves ? like the two Enemies in the same Ship at different Ends, which being ready to perish by Storm, one asked the Pilot which End would sink first, and being told the other End than that he stood on, " then, said he, I shall have the " Satisfaction to see mine Enemy go first." But this is to be understood only of petty frivolous Injustices between private Persons, of which our peaceful Master advises us rather contentedly to suffer many, than contend about them ; for in several Cases it is not only innocent, but we are bound in Justice to have Recourse to Laws, against the fraudulent or violent Invaders of our Properties or Privileges ; because others, our Successors, or those of the same Degree or Condition, have oftentimes a Right in them as well as we ; whereof we are

Guar-

Guardians, and in Part accountable for our Management : Therefore we ought to become Plaintiff or Defendant for their conjoint Rights, though we should be inclinable to give up our own ; and this may proceed with all charitable Regard to the Person who disputes it with us.—And it may be remarked, That, *St. Paul* blames going to Law not as *ἀμαρτία*, a *Sin*, but as *ἰσχυρία*, a *Defect* only ; tho' *Julian*, who had imperfectly learnt the Precepts of Christianity, forbade his Judges to receive their Complaints ; giving for a Reason, that it was their Religion to suffer Injuries : But this is a great Per-
 version of our holy Profession, to think it inconsistent with going to Law in any Case whatever ; so far from it, that it rather establishes the Rules of Justice and Law ; for no Society can subsist without Courts of Judicature ; and we are bound in many Cases to seek Redress there, and right ourselves in order to secure the Peace and Order of Society, Prudence is a Christian Virtue as well as Charity ; and it would be as inconsistent with the former to overlook all Offences, as it is consistent with the Direction of the latter to pass by some : Otherwise, we should become a Prey to the Insolent and Injurious, and invite every one, by our Passiveness, to do us a Wrong who could get any thing by it.

Our blessed Saviour advises us rather to venture a second Wrong, than be prone to redress the first, only in light and supportable Injuries ; as is plain by the Instances he assigns of *smiting on the Cheek, going to Law for a Cloke, or compelling to go a Mile more* than we are obliged. The first implies a striking with the Palm of the Hand upon the Cheek, which as it is rather a Matter of a little Disgrace than great Hurt, imports any tolerable Injury to our Body or Reputation : The other implies an inconsiderable Loss in our Property, that it is not worth while to contend about the Value of
 a Coat,

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a Coat, supposing a Man to have more than one :
The third Instance directs us rather to suffer some
small Infringements of our just Privileges, than
make a Bustle : And therefore the utmost our Lord
seems to restrain us from, is, that we should not
be litigious about meer Affronts, inconsiderable
Debts, or ordinary Trespasses. But in Cases of a
greater Inconveniency he says nothing ; and there-
fore the Law is to have its Course, and a Man may
in all such Cases use it lawfully and christianly enough.

II. It seems to be another Mistake in some, who
being of a heavy insensible Kind of Disposition, not
easy to be provoked to the Resentment of an Injury,
or when they feel the Smart have not Activity e-
nough to execute a premeditated Revenge ; and so
letting it pass out of pure Sloth and Laziness, think
they have forgiven the Offender : There is no Re-
ligion at all in this ; it is rather an accidental good
Effect of a particular Constitution ; whereas a ge-
nuine Christian Forgiveness must be an Act of the
Will, out of Respect to the Duty propounded in
the divine Command : The Virtue consequently is
there greatest, where lies the greatest Difficulty to
be mastered. A quick discerning Person, who
has a nice and tender Apprehension of what is in-
juriously offered, cannot but be angry, and hotly
resent at the first Impression ; but when Reason
and Religion, upon cool and second Thoughts,
operate so as to dispute the Intentions that are
gathering to revenge it, and gradually superin-
duce Thoughts of Reconciliation, not to withdraw
wonted Kindness ; this is Praise-worthy, this
is admirable, this shews a God-like and sub-
lime Temper, a firm Soul : This is the Christian's
Triumph over the strongest Opposition to his Duty,
that a malicious ill-natured World can throw in his
Way. It is the Will must obliterate the Wrong,
else there is no Virtue in forgetting it, i. e. it must
so

so far pass an Act of Oblivion, as never to remember it, but as a Thing pardoned and forgiven; never more to be revived and cast in the Doers Teeth.*

III. There is a third Error in some, who imagine they intirely acquit themselves of this Duty, if pardoning the Offender themselves, they remit the Cause to the Almighty, and appeal to him for Justice. It is true no Injustice is to be fear'd from that righteous Bar; but still such Appeals plainly imply a Wish and Desire of Revenge, that the Person who did the Wrong, may suffer according to his Deserts. What is this but calling in a greater Power to execute what we find ourselves unable for? Now every such Desire of Revenge must be as far from a Christian as the Endeavours and Acts of it. For our Saviour bids us shew our Love to our Enemy, not only by forgiving him, but by interceding to God for his Pardon, even while he by bitter Imprecations is engaging Heaven to our Ruin and Destruction: *Bless those who curse you, and pray for those who despitefully use you.* Agreeably to this, we are told, in the Life of a very good Christian, and great Divine of our Nation, Dr. Hammond, that there was found among his Papers a private Prayer of his own composing, for three scurrilous injurious Enemies of his, without naming their Names, which was the right Way of interceding for them with God, and at the same Time concealing them from the World. Intercede for them we must, forgive them we must; because it is the Condition on which our own Prayers for ourselves are to be accepted, and Pardon granted. Indeed, the genuine Proof of our Love to any

* Pausanias relates it as the Wisdom of the Macedonians, that they in none of their Conquests ever erected any Trophies, lest by preserving the Memory of the Victory it should perpetuate the Quarrel, and provoke their Enemies to more Hatred.

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Person, is, after we have done him all the Good that lay in our Power, to wish for an Enlargement of our Power; and that the divine Goodness and Power would second our Prayers, and consummate his Happiness.

It must be confessed there is an Instance or two in Scripture of seeming contrary Practice; as King David's so oft imprecating the heavenly Vengeance upon his Enemies. But this must be as often understood of *publick* Enemies of his State, and not so much a judicial Malediction from himself, as a Prediction from the Spirit of Prophecy, that God would afterwards punish and chastise them; for as to his personal Enemies, they who *rewarded him Evil for Good to the spoiling of his Soul*, when they were sick (even such Adversaries) he says his *Clothing was Sackcloth*; he humbled his Soul with Fasting; which, whether it had the desired Effect or no upon his Enemies, brought him in certain Returns of Profit; for he adds, his *Prayer returned into his own Bosom*. We may find him very far from the Spirit of private Revenge, when he clears himself and appeals to God, *Pf. vii. 34. O Lord my God, if I have done this, if there be Iniquity in my Hands, if I have rewarded Evil unto him that is at Peace with me: yea, I have delivered him, who without any Cause is mine Enemy*. And again, he shews how he would bear the Usage of Enemies in these Words, *Psal. lv. 12. It was not an Enemy that reproached me, then I could have borne it*.

St. Paul likewise in *2 Tim. iv. 14.* when he says *Alexander the Coppersmith did me much Harm; the Lord reward him according to his Deeds*, appears to supplicate severe Retribution from the divine Vengeance. Now this at most will admit but a like Construction with the other, as being an Apostolical Denunciation proceeding from the Spirit of God, inflicting dire Wrath and Punishment, even deli-

delivering to *Satan*, (as it is thought this is the same *Alexander* that was so delivered) for his invincible Perverseness and Obstinacy against the Word of Faith, which his own Eyes could not but see confirmed by the Testimony of Miracles: So it follows in the fifteenth Verse, *for he hath greatly withstood our Words*. But if the true Reading is not (as some Copies have it) *ἀντιστάτω*, but *ἀντιστάσει* in the Future Tense, *God shall or will reward*, it is a plain Prophecy, and no Prayer.

Having shewn how far this Duty indispensably obliges and detected some Mistakes which are very apt to mislead us in judging of the Sincerity of our Obedience to it; it is convenient in the next Place to point out how far a strict Compliance to it, is consistent with the prudent Conduct of our Lives in the Midst of a crooked and perverse Generation: For certain it is, there are such inhuman ill-natured People in the World, as are not to be obliged by the kindest Overtures and most pacifick Returns which a generous Charity can make for the most ungrateful Injuries done it; but rather grow more insolent and malicious upon it. Thus it is related concerning the Death of one of our *Saxon* Kings, * murdered by two of his Earls; that they being asked the Reason, returned this barbarous Answer, because he was so gentle to his Enemies, as to forgive them as oft as they sought him. And a modern Politician, *Machiavel*, asserts it almost in plain Words, that the Christian Religion, upon Account of this Duty, does as good as give up its Professors a Prey to those who are tyrannical and unjust: The contrary to which I hope to make evidently appear, when I prove the Reasonableness and Advantage of this Duty, which falls under the second Head of Discourse.

* *Oswy* King of *Northumberland*, says *Eachard*.

In the mean Time, it is our Liberty and Wisdom to observe, that this most excellent Virtue may sometimes be imprudent, sometimes too forward, and sometimes unnecessary. For it does not engage us to love a Man the more, the more he wrongs and abuses us; as it was said of that great Archbishop of our Church, *Cranmer*, celebrated for this, that the ready Way to obtain his Favour was to do him some ill Turn. Injuries to him seemed Courtesies; and doubtless he had Favours of this Kind heaped upon him. But this, if true, was such a needless, not to say affected Extreme, that I question whether there is any one now-a-days will be guilty of the same. Reason good; for indeed this Excess of Charity is not only not required, but seems to be plainly forbidden: Inasmuch as we are exhorted by the same infallible Teacher, to be *as wise as Serpents* (which are notoriously cunning in providing for and defending themselves) at the same Time that we are to be *as harmless as Doves*, i. e. give Occasion to no Body to molest us. The Law of Reason tells us to love our Neighbours as ourselves, but not better; and Nature and Reason both whisper to every Man, that he is "his own next Neighbour," and that "Charity begins at Home."

Nor is this Love to an Enemy so void of Discernment, as to reward where it ought to punish; nor so destitute of Sense and Gratitude as to make no Distinction between a Friend and an Adversary. If there are, as to be sure there are, Degrees of social Kindness, questionless the highest Degree and Measure are due to our best Friends and Acquaintance; and the lower may serve our Enemy proportionably to his Qualifications. For some Tempers are not to be bettered, so that Charity, which is every where, but where it can do no Good, and is in Danger of losing itself, seems excused from that

that Application that is so like to be vain or destructive of the great Virtue itself. Some are so brutishly or diabolically malicious, that a bare Forgiveness and Prayers for them, is all the Love that can be expected, as long as a Man really continues such an Enemy: We should endeavour to disable his Designs of any real Power to hurt us, and it would be perfect Madness to give him his Sword again when he is once disarmed; nor can we be so insensible of our own Security and Happiness, as not to be glad when it pleases God to cut off such a Miscreant from his mischievous Intentions.

Though Christian Charity obliges to love all with the Love of Forgiveness; yet Christian Prudence, which is not abolished, but confirmed by the other, chuses some above others to trust and confide in. Other Enemies we may have who are endowed with many laudable and excellent Qualities; and could we convert them to our Friendship, have Capacities adapted to our Occasions and Service. Interest itself should advise us to the Friendship of such, or restore them to the same Place they were in before the Breach: And it is observed, that as *those* Enemies, while they last, are the fiercest, so *these* renovated Friendships are the most durable and lasting; like as a Bone that is broken and set again is strongest in that Part where it is cemented.

But all have not a Title to such a Reception: Some are so subtle and hollow, they can artfully dissemble a Reconciliation, the better to accomplish their treacherous Ends, by a pretended Friendship: Therefore it is said, that the *Italian* prays to God, to defend him from his Friends; but from his Enemies he is able to defend himself. But generally the injured Party ought to be most upon the Reserve; for it is a Matter of constant Observation, and a true Specimen of human Nature, that he who suffers

fers, is the soonest reconciled; he who gives the Offence, the last, if at all, pacified; because he thinks it is not forgot on the other Side. "Tho' I may be sure I have forgiven him from my Heart, I cannot be certain that he has forgiven me. Therefore we ought to blot out the Transgression, so that he may still read it, though we do not; as one prudently said to the Person he was forgiving, I wish you may as well remember your Fault as I shall forget it. I am to give my Brother my Heart and Affections, but not surrender up my Understanding likewise; and though I cannot love him too well, I may confide in him too far; for Trust is an Act of Prudence, and not of Charity", and so falls under no Obligation of Religion.

It would be a rash Credulity to receive an inveterate Enemy immediately into our Bosom: The wise Man advises more cautiously: *Never trust an Enemy; for, like as Iron rusteth, so is his Wickedness: Though he humble himself and go crouching, yet beware, and take good Heed of him, and thou shalt be to him as if thou hadst wiped a Looking-Glass, and thou shalt know that his Rust has not been altogether wiped away. Set him not by thee, lest when he hath overthrown thee, he stand up in thy Place; neither set him at thy Right Hand, lest he seek to take thy Seat, and thou at last remember my Words, and thou be pricked therewith: An Enemy speaketh sweetly with his Lips, but in his Heart he imagineth how to throw thee into a Pit. He will weep with his Eyes, but if he find Opportunity he will not be satisfied with Blood. If Adversity come upon thee, thou shalt find him there first; and though he pretend to help thee, yet shall he undermine thee. He will shake his Head and clap his Hands, and whisper much, and change his Countenance.*

I should proceed to my *Second* General Head, namely, To evince the absolute Necessity and Reasonableness of this Duty, that none may think themselves exempt, and may all be persuaded to comply with it. But of this at another Opportunity.



SER.



S E R M O N

The Thirteenth.

The Christian's peculiar Duty.

M A T T. v. 44.

But I say unto you, Love your Enemies.

IN my former Discourse on these Words, after having shewn that the Duty of loving our Enemies is peculiar to the Christian Religion, and perfectly to be learned neither from the *Jews* nor Heathens : In order to rectify the Mistakes in our Discharge of it, I proposed,

- I. To state the just Meaning and Extent of the Command, how far it indispensably obliges, and wherein also it is strictly consistent with the prudent Defence and Opposition every Man is at Liberty to make against his Enemies ; and,
- II. Lest any might think it not generally incumbent upon all, but obligatory to those only who would arrive at the heroick Degrees of Christian Perfection ; I was to evince the Necessity, and recommend the Reasonableness and Example of its Practice, that none may pretend to be exempt, and that all may be persuaded to comply with it.

The *first* Head I have already dispatched ; the *second* is now before your Consideration. My Part is to recommend and press this Duty, of Loving our Enemies, from the Necessity, the Reasonableness, and Examples of performing it. Of these in their Order.

I. Of the Necessity of this Duty the Scriptures of the New Testament has taken a remarkable Care to convince us : It fastens it upon all its Hearers and Readers, by such strong and forcible Expressions, urging and repeating it so frequently, that we cannot help collecting an indispensable Obligation thereto. I formerly shewed, in distinguishing the Measure and Degree of this Love enjoined towards our Enemy, that it mainly consisted in forgiving the Injury done us, *i. e.* not only to forbear revenging it, but to free our Heart of every Grain of the Leaven of Malice or Ill-will, that may either impair, or delay the common Charity due to him ; or obstruct the Kind Offices we are capable of doing him. Inasmuch as we are commanded universal Charity to all Men, pardoning an Enemy will be at least the restoring him to the same Love he had before he committed the Offence.

It is particularly manifest, that this is the prescribed Meaning and Manner of our personal Love and Forgiveness of those who *trespass against us* ; because it is the self-same Kind of Forgiveness we request of God for our own Sins and Provocations, *viz.* That he would so mercifully blot them out, as still to continue his gracious Benefits to us. And as this is the Christian Forgiveness, or Way of overcoming Evil with Good, we are every one bound to it under the absolute Forfeiture of our own Forgiveness ; and that peremptorily declared by our Saviour both in negative and positive Terms.

To

To confine myself to a few Places; he says affirmatively, *Forgive, and it shall be forgiven you.* Not as if this was the only Requisite to Salvation, but this hardest and difficultest being attained, other Virtues, as easier of Practice, are supposed not to be wanting, which all together only give us an Assurance of Gospel Forgiveness, and its happy Consequences in the World to come. It is, moreover, negatively and exclusively decreed; *If ye forgive not Men their Trespases, neither will your heavenly Father forgive you your Trespases.* And in *Matth. xviii. 35.* it is superadded, *So likewise will your heavenly Father do unto you, if ye from your Heart forgive not every one his Brother his Trespases.* A verbal Remission will not serve the Turn; no playing the Courtier here; but we must be sincere and cordial, and mean what we say, if it comes to Overtures of Reconciliation and Friendship; if not, still we must forgive from our Heart.

We should lay the Emphasis of our Observation upon the Expression, *So likewise will my heavenly Father do unto me,* as it imports them emphatical Moral, being the intended Application of the whole preceding Parable, in which the King is represented to have actually forgiven the vast Debt of 10,000 Talents to his Servant; yet, for his cruel barbarous Treatment so quickly after to a Fellow-Servant, for a trifling Sum, the King upon the first Notice seems forthwith to cancel his former Remittance, as ill-bestowed on a Wretch, who had so disingenuously abused his Favour; and, as he notoriously deserved, delivered him over to the Tormentors, for the old Score, which was remitted only upon Condition of his merciful Disposition to others, and consequently retracted for that fresh and flagrant Instance of unconscionable Want of Charity, and Hard-heartedness to his Brother. *So likewise will the King of Heaven, the Judge of the Quick and Dead, suspend the plenary Pardon and Absolution*

of our immense Sins against him, till he proves whether we *persevere unto the End* in *Patience* and *Long-suffering*, and *Loving-kindness* to our Brother. If not, he will increase our Damnation, and recharge upon us the Guilt of our former Iniquities; towards which he promised to extend his Mercy only on Supposition that we shew Mercy likewise to our offending Brother.

I am now engaged to represent the indispensable and irremissible Necessity we are all of us under to submit to the Practice of this Duty. And, unless we can bring ourselves to this Perfection, it plainly appears, by the peremptory Decrees of Heaven, that there is no Hope that we can be saved; which surely is an Argument, if any, that is able to convince us of the dreadful Danger we unthinkingly run, by neglecting it so generally as we do: If any Motive is cogent, this certainly must dispose us to bend our stubborn Minds to a Compliance; and that in Time too, that our charitable Disposition may be proved by the charitable Deeds of our Behaviour, and while the Offender yet lives to enjoy the Benefit.

But what Need of Words to persuade to that indispensable Necessity, which all Christians, real or nominal, seem in their Minds to be already convinced of: Only the Generality finding the Practice so hard and irksome, fairly defer it to the last Period of Life. Then the greatest Oppressor and Robber, will, with the utmost Solemnity, declare, *be dies in Charity* with all the World: A very credible Time, truly, to pretend Charity, when all Power and Possibility of injuring any longer is just expiring with him! But the true Sense of such Declarations is much like what one ingeniously confessed: "If I die (said he) I forgive him, meaning his Enemy; but if I live, I'll be revenged on him"! If this is the only, it is a most unfit
Time

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Time to perform it ; for the Season of shewing our Charity is, when we are possessed of Power, of Means, and of Opportunity of retaliating on, and endamaging our Adversary.

We shall do well to observe further, how our blessed Lord has taken the earliest Method possible to instil it into us, even when we are first capable of Praying, and for the better habituating and inculcating its daily Practice, has made it the necessary incumbent Business of every Day of our Lives ; by having inserted into our daily Prayer, that perfect one he graciously gave us, as the qualifying Condition whereon our own Forgiveness determinately depends, and the Measure by which it will be dispensed : *Forgive us our Trespases, as we forgive them that trespass against us.*

Now, whoever addresses his heavenly Father in this Prayer with a malicious unforgiving Heart, does in plain Words, upon his Knees, and out of his own Mouth, desire him not to forgive him his own Trespases ; which devolves upon himself (dreadful to be thought!) the greatest Imprecation he could wish on the Person he so much hates and refuses to forgive. If we, the Disciples of *Christ*, therefore, will not consider it, we must expect to have our Prayers heard, and be for ever miserable at our own Request. People may write and talk of Signs of eternal Reprobation ; but can there be a greater Sign of it, than such an unforgiving Temper, seeing we are so peremptorily assured, *if ye forgive not Men their Trespases, neither will your heavenly Father forgive you your Trespases?* Rather let them (for it is more consistent) till they come to a better Temper, lay their Prayers aside, and then farewell all Virtue and Duties of Religion ; till from one Wickedness to another, they arrive at the Region of Malice, and Society of spiteful Devils,

vils, who industriously instil this hellish Vice into unthinking Men, on purpose to bring them to be Companions of their own Damnation.

How necessary, how very necessary then, is the contrary Divine Grace of Charity, for *overcoming Evil with Good*? How worthy is it to be the Object of our earliest Endeavours, and the improving Practice of our whole Lives? It has the Pre-eminence of all other Christian Graces; is the Cardinal Hinge on which the social Virtues turn and move. The Want of it unqualifies every other Virtue of a Christian from Acceptance with God, and the Presence and Power of it imbrues the Soul with a heavenly Disposition for future Glory; and at present gives great Success to our Prayers, which can bring down all the Blessings of Heaven and Earth.—But such is the incomparable Excellency of the Christian Institution, that nothing is made necessary but for that previous Reason, because it is most equitable to be practised; which brings,

To the 2d Recommendation of this Virtue, the *Reasonableness* of it: The first Article of which I crave Leave to resume from the forgoing Instance of God Almighty's Promise of extending, and Threats of denying his Mercy and Remission to us, according as we shew, or refuse ours to our Fellow Creatures. The gracious Condescension, the most engaging Reasonableness and Equity of this Proceeding, is obvious to every one, who will give himself Leisure, (and God has denied to almost none the Capacity) to consider and compare the infinite Disparity of the Offenders, the Quality, the Number, the Aggravation of the Crimes: That an Omnipotent Power and Majesty, incapable of Injury, and consequently of Reparation and Satisfaction from sinful Dust and Ashes, should,

should, upon relenting, please freely to remit us a Debt of 10,000 Talents; Sins and Iniquities without Number, committed Day after Day, in the most provoking, in the most ungrateful, in a thoughtless, in an inexcusable Manner; and that he promises this, he does, he cannot fail to perform it, upon no harder Condition, than that we, we Men of like Passion, mutually standing in need of as many Pardons as we grant; that such dependent Creatures as we, who can revenge no Injury but by the divine Permission; we, who are limited, and can do or suffer but a few Wrongs, (the greatest of either being no more in Proportion than as 100 Pence to 10,000 Talents, or one to 6000); that we should, in the Security of having such a prodigious Sum forgiven us, which must otherwise undo us for ever; I say, that we should relent and forgive our Brother his trifling, inconsiderable Debt; which we can be little the worse for, and are sure of receiving a noble Remittance on the Account of from other Hands. To consider that Almighty God, who might have dispensed his Favours and Pardon to Mortals upon any difficult Terms in their Power, should chuse to do it upon so easy and so mighty reasonable ones as these are, Oh, the ineffable Riches of divine Mercy and Goodness! How unreasonable and inexcusable are the Dealings of uncharitable hard-hearted Men! How just and equitable their Condemnation! how easy and rational the Way and Means of escaping it! For, had our own Reason been to make Choice, no Man in the World could have desired fairer or more equitable.

And in respect to Mankind, our Neighbour, so upon the Square is this Duty to Reason, to Nature, and to the Relation of Things, that 'tis founded upon the received Principle of common
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Humanity and natural Justice, *viz.* of *doing as we would be done by*: "Revenge being (as one excellently argues) the greatest Offence against this Rule; for he who revengeth an Injury, has in his own Opinion received one; he, who has received one, best knows what that is which he would not have another do to him. The Nature of Evil and Injury is better known to the Patient than the Agent: Men know better what they suffer than what they do." He therefore that is injured, perfectly knows how grievous it is; and will he do that to another?

As to the positive Acts of Beneficence for *overcoming Evil with Good*, there is no Reason we should withhold them from our Enemy; for consider we,

Secondly, As Mercy and Benevolence, and all Manner of human Courtesies are due to all the same rational Kind; so no spiteful or disobliging Carriage can disentitle an Enemy to the Benefits of such a Claim, which we are bound to pay him for that very unforfeitable Capacity, as he is a Man, and as he is a Brother, of the same Make and Resemblance, under the same Covenant of mutual Duty, of the same Hopes and Expectations for discharging it well. And, lest Reason should forget itself, while our Enemy is in Distress, Nature over and above has wisely inserted in us those tender Propensions and Sympathies, that we must first do violence to our own Flesh and Blood, before we can deny him Relief. Tho' the Object is wicked, yet Relief is given to the Man, and to his Necessities, not to his Vices nor his Failings.

But then, if he that has done the Injury is of the same Country and Religion, by so much sure will the Argument and Inclination be the stronger in the Common Acceptation. There are indeed some Christian Countries, where even both these
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are of very little or no Force; where Revenge is called a Debt, and is sometimes accordingly entailed upon the Heir to exact Satisfaction. Whereas St. Paul, *Rom. xiii. 8.* bids us *owe no Man any Thing, but love one another.*—But, God be thanked, those Places are pretty distant from us. We cannot help observing, however, that lamentable is the Power and Tyranny of national Custom and Education, which is a Scandal both to Humanity and the Christian Religion.

It is a pleasing Reflection, that the pernicious Custom of revenging Injuries and Affronts by set Duels, is so much abated in this Nation. It was originally of Foreign Extract, and got Footing here rather thro' Imitation, than from the Native Disposition of the Inhabitants. It has been so variously and rationally exposed, (which is effectual to confute a confessed Folly) that it offers to make no Defence or Excuse for deliberate Rencounters, but the fantastical Notion of a mistaken Point of Honour, exploded in a Manner every where, but in the Camp, where the Sword more properly distinguishes Merit. Exploits of that Nature are seldom committed now but in rash Passion; and then never fail to be repented of; and when found out, often undergo the Punishment of the Law.—It is only every good Man's Wish, that the Age would as sensibly reform other many and growing Enormities.

A *Third* Argument for the Reasonableness of Loving our Enemies is taken from the Improvements and Advantages we may make of them. It is the best Office of Malice, that it presently finds out such Flaws and Miscarriages to hit us in the Teeth with, which perhaps we did not see in ourselves, nor had our Friends the Honesty to acquaint us with: Hence it is an experienced Observation, "That he who would not do amiss
twice,

“ twice, should either have a faithful Friend, or
 “ an ill-natured Enemy to tell him of it.”

But should any one raise Calumnies without any Grounds, when they come to be detected and cleared up, these will even serve to raise an injured Reputation the higher, and make Ill-willers pity the hard Fate that Innocence and Merit oft’ undergo now-a-days, from the inexorable Malice of some People.—— God has promised that *all Things shall work together for Good to those who love him* ; and does, when he thinks fit, make a good Man’s Enemies to be at peace with him.— But it is for the most Part necessary to ply him with Enemies to try, and by trying, to strengthen and improve his Virtue.——

It may be, we were engaging in some unlawful Project, which might distract our Affections, or too much encumber us with the Affairs of this World, ’till our loving Father in Heaven raises up some body to interfere in the same Interest, and suffers him out of pure Kindness to cross and disappoint us of the false Happiness we proposed, on purpose to take us from the fatal Pursuit : Shall we then miscale this happy Instrument and Occasion of eternal Good by the Name of an Enemy ? No ; when we sedately consider the Matter, and become our own true Friends, we shall own, that he was a real, tho’ disguised Friend to us ; and, thank God, tho’ we do not him, for the eventual Advantage.

But I would not have this Argument prove too much, “ that it is therefore better to have Enemies, than otherwise” ; and so go about to encrease the Number. It is certainly the nicest Skill of Prudence to have as few as possible. Many Friends may serve to do us some Good ; but one Enemy may, at one Time or other, do much Harm. The Tenor of this Argument then is, that, since it is a Matter impossible but that we shall have
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Enemies, more or less, behave as we will, that we take Comfort, and convert them to the best Use and Advantage.—But,

Fourthly, We shall be further convinced of the great Unreasonableness of Revenge, if we consider it as a presumptuous Encroachment upon the Prerogative of the Almighty, who has declared, he reserves to himself alone the Right, as he alone has the Authority, (which Authority, together with his Name, he has in Cases necessary to Society, graciously deputed to Governors and Magistrates) to call his Family here upon Earth to Account for the Wrongs and Injustices they do one another; and, at our Peril, expects that we Fellow-Servants in the same Household, should not make a Disturbance, but meekly appeal to him, our Master, for Redress, since we ought not, since we cannot be competent Judges in our own Case.—To him, who, as a tender Father, loves us equally, and will do impartial Justice to the Offender, whilst he rewards the patient Sufferer.—To him, our Head, who has constituted us in one Body, under the intimately indearing Relation of being Members one of another, that we might no ways hurt, that we might in all Things tenderly bear with one another.

In the *Fifth* and *last* Place, let us briefly reflect on the Inconveniences, and preposterous Proceedings of Revenge, in order to make us the more out of Conceit with it. And is it not rejected by thinking People as a sure Mark of * Weakness and Imbecillity of Mind, wherever found? As on the one Hand, a Readiness to pardon Injuries, is an evident Token of Greatness and Generosity of Mind, according to that of the Wise-Man: *Prov.*

* Non est magnus animus quem incurrat injuria minuta semper. Quo infirmiores eo magis iracundiae voluptas.

xvi. 32. *He that is slow to Anger is better than the Mighty; and he that rules his own Spirit than he that taketh a City.*——Forgiving Mercy is ever mighty in the Mightiest; whilst the Efforts of Revenge soonest take Possession, and hold it longest in your little-minded froward sort of People: Who, for the Sake of a false Pleasure, and in Pursuit of an ignoble Gratification, do, in the mean Time, forsake the Peace, and sacrifice the Tranquillity of their own Mind.

Observe how Revenge hurries and precipitates them, (abandoning, for the Time, the Concern for their own Reputation) to any dishonourable Means or Accomplices, that are most likely to accomplish it. But while the Revenger is meditating perhaps impotent Mischief and uncertain Anxiety to his hated Adversary, he foolishly with a Vengeance pulls down certain Disquietude, and commonly greater Damage upon his beloved Self.

The great Art of being easy in an ill-natured World, is to learn to bear opprobrious Language, and pass by many Incivilities, and all tolerable ill Treatment, without Discomposure: By that Means, even in the midst of ill Usage, we shall be out of the Reach, and invulnerable to the Efforts of all the combined Attacks of Enemies round about us. And by persevering nobly to contemn and be unmoved by them, we at last turn the Tables, are sweetly and innocently revenged of them, only by disdaining to revenge the Usage.

And, considering the Course of Things, and the corrupt Nature of Mankind, that *Offences will* and *must come*, how politickly does he consult his own Ease and Composure, who expects them, firmly resolves to bear them, and candidly finds out Excuses for them? There is hardly an Injury done, but will admit of some, (as *Seneca* copiously instances

stances in Cases of Anger *) either from the Age, Ignorance, particular Humour, Mistake, Inadvertence, or Passion of the Offending Person. Does the Magistrate afflict you, if you deserve it, submit to Justice ; if innocent, to Fortune. Is it a good Man who injures you, do not believe it ; is it a bad one, wonder not at it ; you will find Somebody to revenge you ; and without that, you are already revenged, and he is already punished, since he is in Fault, and not you.

Besides, the Scheme of Revenge is to overcome an Enemy : Now Violence and Hostility are not only sinful, but the foolishhest and most unsuccessful Means that can be used for that End. One Thing they never fail in, i. e. to prolong the Quarrel, and bring on fresh and more Injuries : Therefore the Revenger is * less excusable of the two, and more in the Blame than the Aggressor ; for he may plead, he did it out of Ignorance : But the Sufferer can never pretend Ignorance of his Duty to forgive. It is the second Blow which makes the Quarrel : But, if he who has received the first Wrong, tho' he cannot mitigate the ill Design of it by the foregoing Excuses, can but bring himself once to make this generous Experiment, to pass by the Opportunity of retaliating it, and take the first of doing him a Favour ; such an unexpected Return would surprize the Aggressor into Shame for what he had done, give him Remorse, and the greater Opinion and Admiration of the other's Goodness, Temper, and Wisdom. — As in the Instance of *Aristippus*, (which a Christian may blush to hear related,) who having a Quarrel with another, came to petition him for a Reconciliation, tho' perhaps

* Lib. 2. de Ira. cap. 30.

† Non debito dicere magis improbum esse eum, qui illatum ulciscitur quam qui infert injuriam. *Sen. de Ira.* Qui replicat, multiplicat.

imagining himself in the Right all the Time ; yet adding, that he being the elder Man, he supposed it the other's Duty to make the first Step. The other replied ; " Nay then, by this I am sensible " of your Superiority, not only in Years, but in " Wisdom ; in that, when I began the Feud, you " was the first Person who ended it." This was a Victory worth the gaining ; the other, by Way of Defiance, had been better lost than won ; by this he gained one Friend more, and one Enemy less, (if any may be said to be an Enemy to such a Person.)

I am unwilling to suppose that any Heathens should out-do Christians in Overtures of this Nature ; tho' the Reproach is to be regretted, how much we are degenerated from the primitive Love of our best-natured Profession. What was more its antient Glory, so particularly admired by the Heathens, than this ? But now, in Matters of Difference among the modern Disciples of Christ, it is an irreconcilable Punctilio, who shall make the first Motion to Reconcilement ; both Sides, and they both of them Christians, wickedly contending who shall be the last to do his Duty ; but when the Motion is once made, I think it impossible, but that equal, if not greater Love, must be the Consequence among Christians, since it is peremptorily enjoined by Religion.

Thus have I recommended this Duty from its Necessity and Reasonableness, and hope none will now pretend to refuse the one, or deny the other. Permit me now only a few Words on the great Examples of it.

I might insist on the Example of God the Father, (which the Context offers in the Verse after my Text) who *makes the Sun to rise on the Evil and on the Good, and sendeth Rain on the Just and*
on

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on the Unjust.—But I select the more familiar one of God the Son, the blessed Teacher of this Precept ; who became also the Son of Man, took our Flesh and like Passions upon him, that he might enjoin us nothing but what he himself experienced was practicable in the Flesh. Did he bid us love our Enemies? He did it to the utmost Height ; *blest those who cursed him, did good to those who hated him, and prayed for those who spitefully used him and persecuted him.* Not the bitterest Malice, nor the basest Ingratitude could provoke him to any other Return ; yet no Treatment was ever offered so stupendiously malicious and ungrateful.

Where he did most good, there he only procured (incredible ! was it not recorded) most Enemies. *He came to his own, and his own received him not ; his own rejected and persecuted him most.* They of his own Town, and Acquaintance, would have none of his divine Preaching, or beneficial Miracles. He obliged them against their Wills.—And when two of his Disciples prayed him to command Fire from Heaven to consume the churlish Samaritans, how did he blame and disdain the Motion, with *ye know not what Manner of Spirit ye are of ?* Do we not read that he fed those Mouths with a Miracle of Loaves, who presently after exclaimed against him ? And *the Men went about to stone him.* And when his innocent Person was seized, did he not mercifully restore the severed Ear of one of his Aggressors, and reprove the Rashness of the opposing Disciple ? Was it for Want of Power that his Enemies escaped unpunished ? No ; for he declared he had Legions of Angels at his Service. And did he not actually let a small Flash of divine Energy exert itself, and confound a whole Multitude in a Moment ? It is endless to enumerate Particulars : Every Word of his Mouth, every Action of his Life were directed to the Good of

those who hated him, and his dying Words were offered up in Prayer for them. An Example this, that shewed Love in a higher and more sincere Degree to Enemies than we do to our Friends. What Mortal can come up to this sublime Pattern? All that is expected from our Imperfection, is, to imitate it as near and as far as we can; what ill Usage we meet with, what Opportunity we have of doing Good, we must ever forgive one, always embrace the other.

What then, in Conclusion, can possibly be more persuasive than these Words of so endeared a Pattern? *I say unto you, Love your Enemies.* I, who descended from the Bosom of my Father, and suffered the worst Indignities from murderous Enemies, purposely to reconcile you in Friendship to God. It is I who enjoin it, for whose Sake he will graciously pardon your innumerable many, your heinously great Sins and Iniquities, but upon this equitable Condition, which I now set you, That you love, that you forgive one another Trespases that bear no Proportion in Number, or Quality, with what you yourselves are guilty of. Consider that your Ease in this World, and that your Happiness in the next, are both suspended upon it, and then you must resolve upon, and put in Practice this Obedience, if not for my Sake, at least for your own.

I close all with the Words of the Apostle: *Let all Bitterness, and Wrath, and Anger, and Clamour, and Evil-speaking, be put away from you, with all Malice: And be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forbearing one another, and forgiving one another. If any Man have a Quarrel against any, even as Christ forgave you, even so also do you.*

SERMON

The Fourteenth.

The Danger of an Unbecoming Conversation.

PHILIP: i. 27.

Only your Conversation be as becometh the Gospel of Christ.

THE Gospel of Christ has so many indubitable Attestations of its Truth, that 'tis no wonder we receive and profess it with our ready Belief. So clear and engaging a Discovery is it of the right Way to our Happiness, full of Grace and Truth, that we very deservedly glory in the incomparable Privilege; admire the divine Scheme of Salvation, with Thanksgiving to God for such Means of Grace and Hopes of Glory. Nor did we ever do a wiser Thing in our Lives, than when we first entered ourselves Christians out of Choice and Judgment, resolving to stand to and take upon us all that was promised for us in Baptism, as our own Act and Deed; pitching upon *the Author and Finisher of our Faith*, for the great Example of good Life, as we participate of his Name in Token of our Purpose to follow his Steps, of our embracing his holy Gospel for

the Rule of our Faith and Practice. But then the Privilege and Blessing, the Credit and Advantage of Christianity are only ours, as we take Care to fulfil these Exhortations of the Apostle now before us. *I therefore, the Prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that you walk worthy of the Vocation wherewith ye are called. Only let your Conversation be as becometh the Gospel of Christ.*

Conformable to this requisite Conditions, be it only your Care to perform, and persevere in the Practice of this Duty to your Lives' End, and you will be as happy as God designed you, or St. Paul, or any Minister of Christ could ever wish you. But all are disappointed, even the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, whose Names we are baptized into; the Bible and Common Prayer Book, preaching and hearing, assembling ourselves thus here together, are invalidated and made as nothing, in Reference to those many Professors of Christ and his Gospel, who will not be persuaded to that *sober, righteous, and godly Life*, which is indispensably required from them. Their nominal Vocation, as to Religion, it is true, is *Christian*; but take an Account of them, in the Way that God intends to make up his final Accounts, from their Life and Conversation, it is not so much as Semi-Christian in great Numbers, and in not a few apparently Anti-Christian. They may be said to *take up the Name of Christian in vain*: As the Jews did by God's Name, breaking the third Commandment, whose Life was not answerable to such a Profession. And so long they baffle their Vocation, living only to the Woes and Vengeance, instead of the glad Tidings of the Gospel; of which they are the great Reproachers, and the worst Despisers; a shameful Compound of Contraries, intolerable to any reasonable Creature.

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St. Paul tells us (*Rom. x. 11.*) *The Scripture saith, whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.* A great Truth in one Respect; but in the Case of the Text, how many have reason to be ashamed, not for believing in Christ, but for the Unsuitableness of their Lives to such an excellent Belief? We are all, it is too true, prone to mislive the Principles we profess; and from thence commences the perpetual Benefit and Necessity of Preaching, and the Word of Exhortation, which at this Time I shall employ, by

I. Endeavouring to represent how a Conversation unbecoming the Gospel, both damnifies and disgraces the Profession of Christianity, and particularly those Professors who are guilty of it.

II. Through what Prejudices and Mistakes Men continue to misplace the true Religion, and fall short of the Design of the Gospel.

I. An unsober, or unrighteous, or ungodly Conversation, the great Fault and Folly of Christian Professors, reflects a Dishonour, and brings an Imputation upon Christianity itself. For how little Truth and Consistency does the Apostles Creed appear to carry with it, when it comes out of a wicked Christian's Mouth? The Remonstrance of the Poet upon another Occasion, is too applicable on this, *What do I bear Words for, when I see Facts to the contrary?**

Such degenerate Confessors, whether they design it or not, do all that in them lies, to throw a Reproach upon their holy and worthy Profession, and confute their own Persuasion of having any Worthiness in it. When and where a Profession

* *Quid verba audiam, dum facta video.*

that essentially consists in good Works, is only answered by Works and Deeds that are a flagrant Contradiction to that Profession, the Publickness of whose wicked Actions, as long as they are remained in, is for so long a publick libelling their holy Vocation. One can hardly forbear to deplore it as a most effectual Denial of God, the only Contumely in Truth they can offer against our Saviour, and the greatest Shame and Prophanation his Gospel can suffer upon their unworthy Accounts. For the Scripture, and all the Reason in the World makes them especially to be the great Deniers of God, the Language of whose Life says *there is no God*; who profess in *Words* to know him, but in *Works* deny him; being *disobedient*, and to every good Work *reprobate*; i. e. according to the Original, inconsiderate, void of *practical* Judgment.

Of the four Sorts of Atheists; 1st, They who deny the Existence; 2d, They who deny the Providence; 3d, They who hold degrading Opinions of God; 4th, They who live without him in the World, in the Atheism of unrighteous Words and Works, neither worshipping him whom they pretend to believe in, nor obeying the Laws of him whose Authority they disown not; of these four Sorts, I say, these last, as they are more numerous than all the other put together, so are they the most unaccountably inconsistent of Men, being self-condemned, and under the damnatory Sentence of their own Belief.

Besides, the Dishonesty of abusing what is committed to their Trust, they are the worst of Enemies unto God: Being so from pretended Friends. The Argument from Words against his Being is given up as Foolishness; but the Argument from all Lives holds out still against all Words. And does not that directly, though more silently, lead to the same impious Conclusion? Where is the Difference

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ence between living as if one believed in reality there was no God, and Religion was all a Cheat, and the declaring the same Thing by Word of Mouth; but that the former is safer, and more fashionable, than the latter; whilst the Wretch gives Existence to God, for no other apparent Reason, but that he might audaciously affront him with Variety of Provocations?

The Kingdom of Christ is not in Word, nor yet in the Form of Godliness, but the Power thereof: And till it work some of that Power in us, none of the Ends of its Institution are yet obtained upon us. The Power of Godliness is to make us better, and so render us, and the rest of the World happier. The End of Reason is the usefullest Knowledge, the End of that Knowledge is the right ordering ourselves in the Relation we stand in by the Constitution of Things, and the revealed Appointments of God: For the Gospel has the self-same End that Right Reason has, the regulating our whole Behaviour in all good Conduct towards Men, and the Care of serving and pleasing God.

And besides, what human Reason could never have found out, it unfolds; and ascertains us of the mightiest Inducements, Means, and Motives, that the Counsel of God could devise, on purpose for making us Believers a *peculiar People*, more zealous of good Works than all the World besides: It opens the Kingdom of Heaven, and shews the Profusion of the Mercy of God to Sinners in his Son our Saviour's Birth in the Flesh for our Example; his Death for the Propitiation of our Sins, his being at the Right Hand of God as our perpetual Intercessor: It has therefore fixed our otherwise wavering Hopes of Pardon and Reconciliation for past Offences, laying before us the Promise of all that is happy to future Obedience; and to Disobedience the Threats of the most dreadful Endurance.

And all this is designedly revealed from Heaven, for meliorating our Lives, destroying the Works of the Devil, cleansing us from all Sin, and furnishing us with all those Qualifications that are indispensably meet to make us *Partakers of the Inheritance of the Saints in Light.*

And what indeed could Heaven do more, either for quickening our Repentance, or promoting the divine Nature, or that Likeness of God in us, who does Good to all his Creatures, by doing all the Good we can in our Station?

Were then the gracious Truths and Discoveries of the Gospel imparted to us as News to gratify our Curiosity, and be extolled and continually disputed in Speculation; or rather as so many wanted Helps and Directions for a religious Life, and a heavenly Conversation? Certainly the Son of God had never come down from Heaven, but for redeeming us from a *vain Conversation*; Faith, Hope, Fear had never been mentioned, but for Love and Charity, for Purity, for perfecting Holiness. Were not these necessary to be practised, the Knowledge of God is a needless Attainment; the Doctrine of a Mediator between God and Man becomes an Amusement, without Aim or View; the Certainty of a future Judgment a Cypher, an idle Story. Wicked Christians do indeed make them all so, to their own Delusion and Destruction, who take no Care to correspond to their Design of influencing them effectually to cease from that which is *Evil*, and do what is *well-pleasing to God*; that they may dwell with him for evermore.

They do all they dare, to shew that there is no Verity in the Christian Religion. 'Tis plain they do not, as yet, thoroughly believe their own Words, when they call themselves by the holy Appellation of Christians. How then can they expect that others

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others should give Credence to them? To lead a wicked Life in Truth and Fact, and at the same Time pretend to be Christians indeed, and in Fact; is the same Absurdity as to pretend to be good without Goodness, or to be light in Darkness. One of these Things must be true; either this is not the Gospel of Christ which we call so, or they are not true Christians, and Disciples of him, who can condemn his most peculiar Commands, and live in palpable Disobedience to its most express and fundamental Laws; defeating the Purpose, profaning the Blessing, and thwarting the whole Scope of the Knowledge of Christianity, by their unhallowed Practices. Had they made a Declaration of living as becomes those who do not in Reality believe the Truth of our holy Religion, there would then, I confess, be some Harmony and Decorum, Consistency and Relation, between their Actions and Professions: But to profess themselves Believers, and by Creed give in that they are certain of these Things, and still live as if they were absolutely certain of the contrary; is the very *Opprobrium* of Faith, the unhappy Support of Scepticism, bringing with it incredible Damage, and Disreputation upon the Christian Institution. For what can be more ridiculous, than to go about to reconcile such notorious Contradictions as the Christian Name, and profligate Manners? Whereas the Scripture lays it down as the Foundation of believing in Christ, and the Name we derive therefrom; *They that name the Name of Christ*, or have his Name superinduced upon them in Baptism, *let them depart*, let them every one depart from Iniquity, 2 Tim. ii. 19. Nevertheless, how many of that goodly Denomination are not only tainted with Iniquity, but even greedy of it, mixing Heaven and Hell together, defiling the Characteristick of Piety and Godliness, Purity and Truth, Charity,

Charity, Justice, and Sobriety, with the contrary high Crimes and Misdemeanors?

The Report was current, and the Complaint constant against the Philosophers of old Time, that their Lives were seldom or never of a Piece with their Principles: But this Apology readily presents itself, that the wisest of them were in great Perplexity, and at mere Guesſes about the future State of Rewards and Punishments: A dubious Life might therefore very well become a dubious Belief. But when *Life and Immortality*, which was Doubt and Darkness to them, is clear *Light and Certainty* to us Christians; who can offer any Excuse for our shameful Repugnance, and unworthy Carriage, so dissimilar to, and wide from the Worthiness of our believing?

O transcending Christianity! matchless for Privilege, for Remedy, for Grace, and for Truth! the last Display of the Wisdom and Goodness of God for making Men wise and happy; that thou shouldst ever be Witness of so much Immorality and Transgression among thy Professors! that thou shouldst see so many of them commit shameful Things without Shame, and suffer so much Indignity, and unseemly Treatment in the House of thy Friends! that thou shouldst behold us Christians, who are likewise the Sons of Christians, so void of Fidelity, and the Consideration of our own Interest and Reputation, as to attempt to dishonour and violate thy pure Vocation; and by our own Act and Deed dash thy Hope, as it were, out of our Hearts, and erase that Title to eternal Life, whereunto thou hast called us! That we should represent thee, the most lovely of all Religions, mis-shapen and deform'd, by Reflection cast back upon thee from the ugly Copy of too many of our Lives! For Christianity is, indeed, lovely and loving, benign and peaceable; but under that De-

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nomination how many of us delight in Hatred, abound in Strife, Contumely, and Spite. That is forgiving, and full of Compassion to Wants; we revengeful, and hard-hearted: That is grave and thoughtful, always upon the Improvement under Affliction; we, for the most Part, giddy and improvident; and, instead of amending, growing worse under the correcting Hand of God. That has its Words and Conversation season'd with Grace and Innocence, to the Use of edifying; but how many of us have ours larded with Oaths and Curfes, Scurrility or Lewdness? That full of Simplicity and Sincerity; we of Guile and doubting: That is humble, patient, contented, always sober; we proud, self-sufficient, frequently guilty of unlawful Pleasures, and Intemperance in those that are lawful: That is entirely upright; but how often do some of us borrow its Countenance, to cheat the better with it? Behold that with its Aspect to Heaven, and Affections upon Things above; behold in us the Spirit of the World regent, and we, for the most Part, faced about from Heaven, cleaving in Soul to Things below. That has habitual Care, proper Fear and Circumspection, to the Avoidance of the Appearance of Evil, answerable to the great Concern of effectually securing Salvation: But the Generality of us, it is certain, are so indolent and defective in the prescribed Methods and Directions, Care and Diligence for *working out our Salvation*; that what we do towards it not only amounts to little or nothing that is substantial, and promotive of the same; but (O dismal Truth!) our Zeal, Industry, and Attention, are engaged upon the Ways that directly lead to, and plainly design our Damnation. Design it, I say, with Pity: For suppose a Man so abandoned to his own Ruin, as to design damning himself everlastingly; in Prosecution of that Design

sign what would he do? He would neglect praying to God, or, which is the same Thing, he would pray only *with his Lips*; he would forbear keeping the Lord's Day, coming to Church or Sacrament, or, which is all one, he would prophane and nullify them all by Hypocrisy; he would close with every Opportunity for gratifying his Ambition, and Avarice; he would prosecute his Envy and Revenge as far as he could without Danger from the Law; he would lead a sensual Life, having all his Thoughts how to satisfy every Lust, every Appetite, with every Vanity, as far as could be done with Safety, or civil Decency. Now if he does all these Things to make sure of his Design of future Damnation, pray let me ask what is it we design, who are actually guilty of the same Things? Or do we consider what we are doing, and whither our Doings tend?

How disagreeing, compared together, is our Profession of Salvation, from our Actions! one is ready to excommunicate the other. The whole Piece of Christian Principles is regularly and charmingly interwoven by a divine Hand, meet for Angels to wear; the Sute we make of it to ourselves, for the Generality of both Sexes, when they *put on the Lord Jesus Christ*, is so stained, and patched, that it is not easy to know that it came of the same heavenly Piece. The Garment disavows the Piece, the Piece almost disclaims the Garment.

Where such excellent Means, so powerful Hopes and Fears, and the affecting Blood and Wounds of Christ are received as a Propitiation for our Sins, and no suitable Amendment follows; it goes a great Way, indeed, in nullifying the one, before Men, and trampling under Foot the other.

But let our holy Religion have its Due, in the due Consequence of that regular Conversation of its Votaries, which is worthy of it; let more of us,

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(Thanks to God for the Examples of some) let more of us, I say, conform, in Practice, to its sanctifying Precepts: How good and sacred, how true and great, how lovely and engaging would the Religion of our Lord and Saviour appear! It would force a Confession, even from the Enemy and the Worldling, that there is something divine in it. But, on the other Hand, the Immoralities of some, the open and deliberate Transgressing, and the Non-performing the Injunctions of Christ observable in so many, and the Mal-performance of Duty, to the very Frustration of it, in many more, together with the Coldness in vast Numbers, occasions Christ, the Master, (more is the Pity) to be condemned in the Disciples, God's blessed Transaction of reconciling and bringing the World to himself in Christ Jesus to fall under Obloquy or Discredit. But what have these Christians to answer for, by whom so great Offence cometh, whether abroad or at home?

The Degeneracy of Christians was the critical Opportunity which favoured the Design, and gave such Success to the Scheme of *Mahomet*, when he set up for worldly Empire, as to be the Founder of a new Religion; which brought after it (the Providence of God permitting, for a Judgment upon Christians apostatizing from their Duty) the greatest Falling-off that ever happened from Christ and his Law: *Mahometanism* being now established in the *Turkish*, the *Persian*, and the *Mogul* Dominions, three of the greatest Empires this Day upon the Face of the Earth.

When the Impostor made a sensual Heaven, and forbid all Disputes, as the only tenable Grounds of his Religion, in Conjunction with the united Efforts of worldly Power; how easy was it for him to gain his Point upon sensual Christians, who had tired themselves out, and devoured one another with speculative Disputes, till the Power and Sub-
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stance of Christ's holy and amicable Religion was lost among 'em?

The same Disputes weaken the Christian Interest, and fortify the same Adversary to this Day: Besides, how little Opportunity have the Followers of *Mahomet* of being enamoured with Christianity, and its Reasonableness, from the Lives of its surrounding Professors, who are all fallen from its Purity, and are depraved with various Superstitions, which is the Bane of true Godliness; all concurring to place the real true Religion in every Thing, besides those Things where it does indeed consist, in the doing Good, and being good: Witness the *Romanists* on one Side, the *Russians*, the *Grecians*, the *Armenians*, the *Ethiopic* Christians, on other Sides of the *Turkish* Territories. And the Mistake of translating the Life and Essence of Christianity from the Christian Light and Glory of a good Life and Conversation, to Things and Sentiments less essential, and only as far valuable, as they are instrumental to the other; has it not been the Occasion (who can deny, who forbear lamenting it!) of infinite, of endless Divisions, and of the most derogating Corruption of Manners among Christian People every where?

The old *Turk's* Observation to *Ludolphus* * was, that the Christian was the best Religion, but less observed: The *Mahometan* not so good a Religion, but strictly kept: Therefore he thought it was not Wisdom to exchange one for the other. However, he was out in the Conclusion, seeing it is no Wonder that Religion is more closely adhered to, which enjoins not what a Man ought to be, but what corrupt Nature has inclin'd him to, with Respect to the large Composition in Favour of sensual Gratifications, which is the Case of the

* In the Life of *Ludolphus*.

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Alcoran. Yet the Premises are too true a Satire on *Christendom*. They have a Proverb, moreover, *He that makes a bad Christian, will never make a good Turk.* Without Doubt, the bad Christian, as long as he continues bad, is a worse Enemy to Christ, and so accounted of by him, than the good Turk. The Law of this latter speaks very honourable Things of Christ, and bears Indignation against the Jew, for vilifying his Person; but persuaded he is, (through a strong Delusion which he sees not through, as yet) that his Master *Mabomet* was a greater Prophet, and brought the last Will of God from Heaven: Therefore thinks it his Duty to observe and fulfil it. If he sins in not receiving Christ's Law, still he does not deliberately, nor presumptuously transgress, having not receiv'd it for the Rule of his Life.

We know who hath taught us, that all who have sinned without the Law, shall not be judged by that Law: But the other, I mean, the degenerate Christian, is a Retainer to Christ only to get an Opportunity of ruining his Interest, and to rob his Lord and Master of his Honour; daily traducing him in loud speaking Things, the wicked Works that come from, but should not come from his holy Vocation. He acknowledges the Authority of Christ's Law, and the Divinity of his Person, that he might take Occasion thence to grow the more notorious Rebel, scorn his heavenly Offers, and insult his divine Mercy and Goodness; carries his Name out of insidious Friendship; has eaten and drank at his Table, in his Presence receiving the Sacrament in Hypocrisy. Whether of the twain, think you, is guilty of the most Blasphemy and Provocation against Christ, and his Gospel? One has a Chance for Mercy and Compassion, but the other, we all know, is positively debarred from it before-hand, in the Words of our Judge at that Day:

Day: *Depart from me, all ye Workers of Iniquity,* Luke xiii. 29. Nor has he any Peradventure of escaping the deepest Damnation, but through speedy Repentance, and Newness of Life.

Not to comply with the Terms of Reconciliation which Christ, the Mediator, has proclaimed, is to do worse than Devils: For they never had so gracious an Offer, and therefore the Devil has a just Right and Title to plague us for evermore; especially since, from the solid Proofs of our Faith, we have as much Reason to be satisfied of the Son of God coming down from his Father's Bosom to make us, upon our Repentance, and good Life, the Overture of Pardon, and in that a Crown and Kingdom, as if we had lived at *Betlehem* above 1700 Years ago, and seen it with our Eyes.

We have heard, from the *Indies*, that the ill Conduct of Christians in some Places, has made the Religion of Nature, and the common Sense of ignorant *Pagans*, give this Character of Christians: "Christians are great Drinkers, great Swearers, and great Lyars." The Nation of the *Iroquois*, near *Canada*, are said to answer the Christians, who officiously attempted to convert them, "That they could never believe their Religion to be true, or perswade themselves that the Christians believed it themselves; since their Lives were so much the Reverse of the Doctrines it pretends to teach." And as they are the primitive Christians to those distant *Indians*, good Lord, what a Difference is there between them, and the first real primitive Christians!

But we need not go so far abroad to conceive what Prejudice is done to the revealed Religion of Christ by the scandalizing, and the gainsaying Lives of too many of its Disciples. How readily do the Disbelievers, and Libertines by Principle, of our own Nation, conclude, when they see such

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run to the same Excess with themselves, that they are after their own faithless Hearts, at Bottom believing as little as themselves. Were it not for Disreputation among their Neighbours, and worldly Inconveniencies thence resulting, "we should have these vicious Christians, say they, as openly proclaim their *Atheism*, as their Lives do it, and be one with us in Words, as well as in Works." For if the Fruit tells the Tree, and the Effects lead to the Cause; not what they say, but what they do, must be the Running-Title of their Profession. They say not with their Mouths, *there is no God*; but if their Hearts were to speak for their Lips, what other is the plain Language of their Heart? They are much indeed of one Mind with us. The Course of their Affections and Actions, habitually doing what is evil, and omitting what is good, loudly utters, *there is no God*; and the Sound thereof reacheth Heaven. If they own God and Christ, it is only for Form, and Fashion-sake: For to acknowledge their Authority, and pretend themselves their Servants, without Obedience, is a manifest retracting their own Words, or a meaning nothing by them. Or it may be, they look upon such Christians, as if they took their Religion for a Problem, of which they are neither satisfied, nor concerned, as believing it neither true, nor false; seeing they live sometimes as if it was one, sometimes the other: But for those who believe it true, and yet live as if it was actually false; they look upon them, in Derision, as the most incoherent of all Creatures, and the absurdest of Mortals: But as they deride, they harden themselves more and more in that Wickedness and Infidelity which dwell quietly enough by one another; whilst the other lives in continual Disagreement with his own Mind, and every Time his Profession expostulates the Case with his Practice, it createth the saddest

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Troubles, Wounds, and Upbraidings within him : At him, therefore, they mock, and well they may, for neither changing his Life, nor his Belief; applauding their own worse Choice because they are consistent with it. They freely, therefore, indulge themselves in sinful Courses, because they pretend to no Creed, no After-hope, or Fear, that obliges them to the contrary. But when they see a Follower of the holy Jesus live up to his Direction, and do the becoming Duties of such a Calling, they secretly admire the Man, if not for his Virtue, at least for his Consistency, and the good Understanding, and the near Relation they perceive between his Belief and Actions, his Engagements and his Performances : They plainly discern that he has a lively, conscious Sense of those Obligations he makes Profession of being under ; that there must needs, therefore, be some Power of Truth in that Profession, some doubtless Excellency in the Tree whose Fruit is so very excellent. Nor is any other Argument than this, which is so full of Probity, a Proof (being a closer, truer, and diviner than all Demonstrations and Syllogisms) better calculated, for convincing and converting them, that *God is in Christians*, in good Christians, *of a Truth*; and so bring them over to the Obedience of Christ. So much does the good, *i. e.* the real Christian, *adorn the Gospel*, consult the Glory of its Founder, and the Interest and Increase of his Kingdom ; whilst the nominal, the falsifying, *i. e.* the bad Christian, deforms his own Profession, vilifies his very Principles, runs counter to his own holy Faith, by the Unholiness of his Life ; and so becomes a great Obstruction to the Propagation of Christianity, and does what he can to deliver up Christ as an Impostor, and a Laughing-Stock to the Unbelievers of this World. Insomuch that a very considerable Writer (Mr. Bayle, in his *Reflections upon*

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the Comet) observing, doubtless, the slender Fruits of Virtue growing from the Faith of Believers, has undertaken, in *Theist*, and in *History*, to make out, that *Atheism* does not necessarily conduct Men to bad Morals: A most keen Satire upon Christianity, enough to startle all Christian People out of a Continuance in Iniquity. However ill he has supported the Charge, it carries this Moral with it, "That if Christians are bad and profligate, they are certainly the worst of Men, having corrupted their Obligation of being the best."

Let us therefore begin a new Life, and set about to shew Heaven upon Earth, *i. e.* true Christianity, which is as a Ring taken off the Finger of God, to seal and mark those with a divine celestial Character, who are fit for that Part of the Kingdom of Heaven which he has purchased for his Followers. Let our Belief instruct the Heathen, and stop the Mouth of contemporary Gainsayers, and win them over to the Truth; by working in us all Virtue, and Godliness of living. *Whatever Things are true, are honest, are just; whatever Things are pure, lovely, and of good Report; if there be any Virtue, any Praise, let us think on these Things,* as Chap. iv. and Ver. 8. of this Epistle recommends; and so think of them, as to make them appear bright and charming in the Comment of our Lives and Conversations, and satisfy every Beholder how great a Happiness they deprive themselves of, by a contrary Conduct. When once we shall live in so Christian a Manner, they will see in us the Image of what passes in Heaven; when they behold always the same exemplary Modesty and Meekness in us, when they find us exempt from sinful Anger, disengaged from Envy, averse to Avarice, free from unruly Passion, and regular throughout, they will break forth in Transport of Admiration, and say, If Christians are in this Life Angels, what will

will they be after Death? If their Lives are so transcending in a Place where they consider themselves as Strangers, what will their Glory be in that Place which is properly their own Country? Thus we shall edify Unbelievers, and incline them to embrace our Faith; and the Reputation of our Virtue will be as far diffused as our Religion in the Time of the Apostles. Since twelve Men were then able to convert whole Cities and Provinces, if we at present, (supposing the Subjects of this Crown twelve Millions) should all imitate them, and each of us endeavour to make Life an apostolical Model of Piety, what Progress would Christianity, with our Traffick, make over the Globe of this Earth? Thus should we impart *Light to them that sit in Darkness*, and *recover many from the Error of their Ways*. — And let us indeed labour the more to secure our own Salvation, that afterwards we may contribute to that of others. Let us, at least, not enhance our Damnation by accumulated Negligence of the best Means in our Hands for escaping it: Which brings me, in

The next Place, to mention briefly the Damage and Defamation which accrues to that Person in particular, who foully abuses the Gospel with his base Life.

Surely it is a Shame to be found only a Christian in Name, and in such sort of empty, superficial Internals, as serve no farther than to keep that Name alive, like the Church of *Sardis*, which *had a Name that it lived* before Men, but was dead before God. There may be the Appearance of a Man when his Shape is cut out in Wood; so is there an external looking Christian in the external Rite and Forms of Godliness, when the inward Principle of Fructification, the Spirit and Genius of the Gospel, is dead and cold at his Heart as Clay under Foot. But as often as his unrighteous Conversation

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tion is habitually and openly the Reverse of his righteous Profession, all the Blood in his Body should flush in his Cheeks to shew the Colour of his Sins as Scarlet. When any one calls him by his Christian Name, he should hide his Head, and be afraid to answer, not knowing himself by it, seeing his own opposite Doings have long since unchristianed what others had done for him. Should any one ask him for the Vouchers of his Faith, that Faith of his, I mean, which St. *Jude* calls holy from its Purpose holy Manners, he has nothing to shew but his Godfathers and Godmothers; and till he has something to produce in his own Person, is it not plain that he is a Christian as yet only by Deputy? He is guilty of a moral Lye in calling himself a Christian, and yet not do the Works worthy of that his Relation. The Name of God or Christ, without becoming Virtue, is a Word, a Sound, an Echo, a Nothing.

It is said to be usual with a *Muscovite* Christian to take off the Cross and lay it on one Side, which is given them in Baptism to hang about their Neck to their Lives End, when they are about to commit some infamous Crime, lest the Badge, as they account it, of their sacred Profession, should be Witness of the Defilement, and the Breach of Trust. It is reported in Travels of some *Indians* in *Congo*, who having been by some *Romanist* baptized, but afterwards finding the Christian Religion obliged them to forsake such and such Ways, particularly the Plurality of Wives, came back to their Converters and fairly renounced their Profession, since they were resolved not to forego the other; which was a Part of Consistency and natural Ingenuity in them; implying, that the living contrary to one's solemn Engagements, is the abandoning of all Honour and Honesty, Faithfulness, and Sincerity; and that we Christians ought to be either on or off

of our Profession, and shame ourselves out of Inconsistency and Iniquity.

But some among us receive the Articles of the Christian Faith, and enjoy the publick Service of an excellent Church, so as to put Stings and Remorses into their Conscience, without operating to their Amendment and Salvation; and till it does so operate, no body can wish them much Joy of their Knowledge, or their Church Membership. For both concur in condemning them to deeper Misery, doing them both Shame and Reproach, by the well-proved Indictment of traiterously violating the best Means of Grace, and prostituting them to Sin, and the Service of the Devil.

As the *Truth is in Jesus*, He is to receive the *many Stripes*, who so well know his Master's Will and would not do it: To him that knoweth to do Good and doth it not, to him it is *Sin*. And *better had it been not to have known the Way of Righteousness*, 2 Pet. ii. 10. *than after they have known it, to turn from the Holy Commandment delivered unto them*. Let all the Wicked among us recal their Pity from Heathen Nations, and weep for themselves; the other has none of the Abuse of Mercy, and Christianity to answer for. *It will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah*, Cities that never heard the Sound of the Gospel, *in the Day of Judgment, than for you*; for you assisted, for you enlightened, for you incorrigible, for you perjured Christians, to whom God sent his Son, and gave his Word, his Word frequently set forth with great Earnestness in the Admonitions of Preachers. All Means of Grace will be so many Articles of Indictment, against thee unhappy Person, unworthy Christian, for the Non-Improvement, for the perfidious Abuse thereof! There will be a Heap of Aggravations upon thy Sins, of a deeper Condemnation than any other, if thou still goest on to insult and
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revile Christ, perfectly well knowing him to be *thy Lord, and thy Redeemer*; and because thou borrowest the Cloak of a sound Orthodox Belief for no other Use but to be guilty of the most damnable Heresy, that of a wicked Life, dost thou expect the *End of thy Faith, the Salvation of thy Soul*? Thou dreamest certainly, while thou pursuest not the Way and Means of *Holiness, without which no Man shall see God*. As thou art guilty of Hypocrisy, and the *Gall of Bitterness* is in thee, thou art lost to all Intents and Purposes. *Thou destroyest thyself*; if speedy Repentance does not kindle some Hope in thee, and begin the Decency of Living in Agreement with thy Principles; *walking worthy the holy Vocation wherewith thou art called*.

Oh! why will you take in greater Light only to condemn yourself to sorer Judgment, for not walking according to it? *The Strength of Sin is the Law*. When therefore you have got the Knowledge of the Law, and of your Obligations, the Path-way to your Happiness, you have only established in your own Breast a Tribunal against yourself, and filed up Matter of Conviction and Accusation, if you do not obey the Truth, if you do not pursue your eternal Interest: God's Law and your own Consciences both convince you of Wickedness, and deliver you over to Inexcusableness, and to Misery everlasting. Let me therefore adjure you by your Vow of Baptism, by all that is sacred and serious, by all that is dear, by the Mercy of Christ, by the Truth, by the Excellency of his Gospel, by the Terror of his Word, by the Hopes of his Glory, let me beseech you in the Words of St. Paul, and prevail; *if there be any Consolation in Christ, any Comfort of Love, any Fellowship of the Spirit, any Bowels and Mercies, let your Conversation be as becometh the Gospel of Christ*: Which God of his infinite Mercy grant!



S E R M O N

The Fifteenth.

The Nature and Duty of Attention.

HEB. ii. 1.

Therefore we ought to give the more earnest Heed to the Things which we have heard, lest at any Time we should let them slip.

I SHALL not detain you with the Comparison between the Jewish and Christian Institutes of Religion, how much the Authority of the latter lays claim to our Attention beyond the former, in regard to the Dignity of the Person establishing it, so immensely superior to Prophets or Angels, those promulging Ministers of the Jewish Law ; as the preceding Chapter, and almost the whole of this Epistle, bespeaks greater Reverence of Consideration, to give a special kind of Enforcement to the righteous-making Inference of the Text : But rather endeavour (seeing the Preference of Christianity above Judaism is a needless Thing to be much insisted on among Christians) to give you the general Good of this apostolical Charge ; as it earnestly addresses every Christian, for those concurring Operations of your Mind,

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Mind, which are the receiving and improving Instrument of the Truths and Doctrines of our wise and holy Profession. Forasmuch as every Thing blessed is present, and nothing whatsoever is wanting to make us the good and happy Persons it would have us ; tho' some willing Hinderance or other, makes it ashamed of too many of us ; and becomes the self-accusing Occasion of those fatal and pernicious Consequences, the present Danger, and the future Ruin of so many Christians : Yet the Instrument of religious Reflecting is in all our Hands, the Bad as well as the Good ; our Reason is born to the goodly Fruit of that manly Self-benefit, as we ourselves are born to Reason : We all feel the Power, and may when we please make the Experiment, of turning the Direction of our Mind, and holding it upon any Subject, especially that which belongs to us, as the Right of our Duty ; it is plain, therefore, it is in our Power, because we can interrupt that Direction, break off the Attention, and divert it to another ; just as freely as we can fix our Eye upon, or call it off, any Object.

As the Instrument of religious Reflecting is in the Hands of us all, the Bad as well as the Good, for our Improvement, under this apostolical and most earnest Charge : That we may see our certain Interest, and forthwith embrace it with the *more earnest Heed* : That we may break thro' all Obstructions, and give up ourselves seriously and effectually to the Admonition and Salvation of the Text, I shall 1st, endeavour to shew the Grounds of this prescribed Duty. 2dly, the best Manner of performing it ;

First the Reasons which engage us to the Discharge of this Duty, shall be drawn

- I. From the Decency and the Profit of it,
- II. From the Shame and Loss in neglecting it.

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I. Decency and Advantage imports us to undertake this rational Work of Man, this religious Occupation of a Christian. And what is the Distinction, the Honour, and Perfection of Man, and wherein his Prerogative above the subjected Creatures, but as he is constituted to Ends the other are Strangers to; having Faculties for knowing God our Maker, for glorying, for enjoying him; and for discerning the Truth both of that moral, and of that instituted and revealed Good, which are the requisite Means to our Happiness; and of that prejudicial Evil of Sin, the direct Road to Misery and Ruin? What is our Reason intended for, but to apprehend, to distinguish, to infer, to chuse and refuse, to act and forbear, as our true Interest and supreme Happiness directs?

In the Use of Reason, productive of sincere Behaviour, from the East, from the West, the North, the South, many shall come to God and their own Happiness, and *sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the Kingdom of Heaven.* This Faculty, which the Good shew by a good Use, the wicked or the heedless Children of Men have rusting by them, in Desuetude; appearing abroad Day after Day in the Habit of irreligious Inadvertence.

Wisdom, in the Proverbs (ch. viii. ver. 45.) uttereth her Voice to these Men; saying, unto you, O Men, I call, and my Voice is to the Sons of Men. O ye Simple understand Wisdom; and ye Fools, be ye of an understanding Heart.— Get Wisdom; get Understanding. God and Nature call them to employ the imparted Portion, by putting the native Talent to its best and highest Use: So doing, Man exerts himself in his Sphere, acts in Character, and is then most like himself: In not using that Talent to that Purpose, he falls from himself, loses his proper Scope

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Scope and End, and is non-apparent to his own Character.

As the healthful Effects of the Body proceed from Motion respectively, regularly, and properly, so all the good Works of the Spirit are wrought by a necessary Concurrence of its Thoughts and Cogitations upon Good; which are to the Spirit what Motion is to the other: As one is actuated by the Laws of Motion, so is the other by Thoughts, under such spiritual and divine Exercises, which are requisite to Morals.

The Soul is what it is by habitual exerting itself; as the Members and Functions of the Body acquire their Skill and Expertness from Exercise, even to Admiration, by repeated Trials; as in the Fingers of those that play on Musick, the Legs of others that dance to it: So the Mind by Usage, and from a Bent of Attention, must perfect itself in the Culture of its everlasting Good: And so must we ever propose to kindle its Affections, and fix our Resolutions after it.—What Light is to the Eye and Sound to the Ear, the directive Truth of God's Word is to the receptive conforming Powers of the Soul, to be read, heard, and understood by it; so practically understood, as to digest what is supportive of its Life and Vigour, converting the nutritious Word into Chyle, Blood, and Spirits of everlasting Life. *As therefore, he that hath an Ear to hear, let him hear; so he that hath a Mind to reflect, let him reflect.* This performed as it ought, all others flow from and keep it Company. How did the first Christian that ever was, *Mary the Mother of our Lord*, become a Convert, but by *pondering* in her wise Heart *all those wondrous Things* she was privy to? Nor can any since, however christened, continue a Christian indeed, without reflecting what is the becoming Character, and what the personal Benefit and Happiness of being one: How

How like or unlike their Actions are to that holy Calling. This is the Reason, that tho' we are born and bred to the Gospel of Christ, we neither chuse nor embrace it, as a Religion or Rule of Life, whilst we compare it not to ourselves, and ourselves to that, *what Manner of Person* it obliges us to be. But considered religiously, and in the due Use of Self-application, all Things in the World are made to promote our Salvation, and encrease our Virtue, and work together for our Good; whether *Prosperity or Adversity*, Temptation or Joy; whether *Paul*, or *Apollos*, or *Cephas*, (*Moses* and the Prophets, Christ and his Apostles) or the World, the *universe* in all the Duty and Order of its Works; or *Life*, in order to live to him that gave it; or *Death*, as a releasing Passage to a better State; or *Things present*, or *Things to come*; whatever the Providence of God shall order now, or hereafter; these, and all Things else, are ours, if we please, this Way, for our spiritual Benefit; that *whether we eat or drink, or whatever we do, we may do all to the Glory of God*.

Quid est Pietas? said St. Bernard. The Answer was, *Vacare Considerationi*, i. e. "What is Religion but to take Time to consider." Nay, a *Dinner of Herbs*, with reflecting Thanksgiving and Contentment, can afford the Mind more spiritual Repast, than the Bread and Wine in the Sacrament, to an unmindful and unreflecting Receiver. Consider we next the Obligation of this Duty,

II. In the redounding Loss from the Neglect of it. — Without the applying and revolving Attention of the Mind, all Books, together with all Objects sacred or prophane; all Advices, Advantages, Opportunities; whether they import us little, more, or most, are equally lost upon us. Hence

Hence so many Follies to be witnessed daily ; from this Spring you see every Wickedness every where to arise, which is only conceived in the Mind thro' Want of Consideration of the Turpitude of the Thing, our manifold Obligations to the contrary, and the tremendous Consequences it involves the Transgressor in.

Begone, begone, O devilish Inconsideration, into the Herd of Swine. Thy Name is a Legion of Folly, and thy End is Destruction ! For as long as People give their Mind only to forget serious Reflection, chusing inadvertently to walk on still in Supineness, without feeling any Concern for what appertains to their better Life, they wax worse and worse, all Things go to Ruin within them ; the Heart hardens, and an impenetrable Callosity grows over their Faculties. Thus the Pearls of the Christian Religion is lost upon them. Hence so many are found who have no Use of Reason left but to contrive and negotiate for the Body, which all terminates in sensual Good ; nothing moves their Understanding but what may be felt, heard, tasted, or seen : What is otherwise, they think too nice to be considered, or too far off for present Thoughts, or too uncertain to venture any Pains or Inconvenience for its Sake. What they know naturally, as brute Beasts, in that they corrupt themselves : Thus the *Gentiles*, of whom *St. Paul* speaks, *Rom. vii.* though they had the Law of God and Nature as plainly published as was the Nature of Things, yet were they never the better for that Truth, that *το γινωσκον τὸ Θεῖον*, and from an indulged Absence of the Mind, and a total Disuse of interferring their Duty, and reasoning themselves into the Performance of it, they *beld it in Unrighteousness* : Though it flows from the Knowledge of God, just as the Certainty of a God does from the very first Principle of acknowledged Certainty,

tainty, viz. That such Effects are not, cannot be without a Cause proportioned to them, and that can be no other than God.

Nay, the human Degeneracy from the Neglect of Thinking, is known to arrive among many *Africans* and *Indians*, East and West, to that deplorable Extinction of Mind and Man, that they surpass their Companions the Beasts of the Field in a very few Things: Nor do they so much as suspect that they are to blame for sojourning on the Earth with no higher Thoughts: Insomuch that it is first necessary to *humanise* and make them Men, before there is any setting about to make them Christians.

Tho' God publishes never so many Demonstrations of his own Existence, or often-repeated *Deuteronomies* and Exhortations of the Law he has given us, if they are not meditated upon, nor hearkened to, they always slip out of Reflection, and are never, or not often enough, in the Receptance of a fructifying Mind: We shall still live without God, being not under the Government of his Law, and *retaining it not in our Hearts; deceiving and destroying ourselves; our own Eyes, as we read, witnessing with our Ears this Day, how inexcusable we are.* We, who are the central Scale between the Brute and angelick State, demi-natured to both of them, may, just as we please, chuse the Ignominy of sinking into the former, by disusing and disowning our own Powers of Reflecting; or by using them assiduously, rise up to the latter, and shine in the Glories of our Nature, and the dignified Image of God.

Such serious and effectual *communing with our Thoughts*, would be unto us like an Angel from Heaven, taking us in his Arms, and carrying us thither. Thus should we all go on to Advantage, and exalt ourselves, changing the Seldomness of
serious

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serious Consideration, into the Frequency of it; the Nakedness, and the Beggary of good Thinking, into the rich Habits thereof; so might we all improve more and more in our Christianity, by seriously attending to its Design of keeping up a constant Negotiation with Heaven, by godly, sober, and righteous Conversation in this World.

Then would this World, and the Things therein, grow less seen, and less affecting; and the other greater, tho' unseen, become more engaging, only by Virtue of the attending to the Comparison. We should then penetrate with Ease into the Secret of every Christian Precept and Doctrine, and shew the whole Mystery of Godliness plainly in our Lives; and Religion would become, as it were, incarnate in Man, and incorporated into his Behaviour; and the good old Things of our unthought-of Catechism would rise from under the Covert of a Bushel, in a new, shining Light, being considered in this new, serious Manner of Devotion. Thus musing, the Fire under the Embers would at length kindle in our Breasts, and stir up the Tongue to its Confessions and Petitions unto God; and we shall be ready to ask Pardon of God, and our own Reason, for its past Unseriousness and Incogitancy. Which bringeth on the

II^d Head of Discourse; the Manner how this Duty is to be performed.

Now the Manner of considering affects our Minds, just as the Manner of hearing Sounds does the Ear: A grave, solemn one, disposes to Gravity; light Airs to Levity: So slight, hasty Reflecting, strikes a slight, transient Impression; whilst that which is confined, and reiterated with due Concern and Application, leaves a deep and lasting Impression for good. We are not to think for thinking sake, as the Manner of some is; which

which is nothing but Labour for Pains, or a considering as if they considered not; because the End of considering is not considering itself, not a cursory Assent to divine Truths; but to give up our Thoughts, Words, and Works, to their heavenly Influence, for godly Doctrine, for Reproof, for Correction, for Instruction in Righteousness: Not for censuring and amending one's Neighbours, like * your Busy-bodies in other Matters; but for Self-proficiency †. The good Meaning is not to rise up in the Brain in a Posture of taking Leave, or tingle transiently or melodiously, perhaps, in the Ear; but descend to the Heart. *Sonus verborum aures percutit, magister intus est.* 'Tis not the external Letters, Sounds, or Pronunciation, but the concerning Meaning laid to Heart, that makes either wiser or better. That Reception was commanded by the Law of Moses: *These Words which I command thee this Day, shall be in thy Heart,* Deut. vi. 6. And what, in Fact, kept the Psalmist's Goings, after he return'd to himself, from back-sliding, but, as he acquaints us himself, the *Law of his God was in his Heart?* Psal. xxxvii. 32. Had he not given the more earnest Heed, had he, at any Time, let them slip, his Footsteps would have slipp'd also. And, by way of Memorandum to others, he publishes, *Who so is wise will ponder these Things; and so pondering in their Hearts they shall understand the Loving-kindness of the Lord,* Psal. cvii. 45. But how much more worthy is our Gospel to be engrafted inwardly in all our Hearts? As the Comparison is erected in this Chapter, and throughout this Epistle, between the Law and the Gospel; therefore it is that the *more Heed* is here

* ἄλλοις ἐπέκειντο. † Τὴν χάριν ἡ Θεοῦ, τοῦ θείου ἐφ' ᾧ οἱ αἱ ἀγαθὰ θέλει παρασχεῖ αὐτῇ λαβεῖ. Adrian. in Epic. L. 1. c. 29.

made due to the latter beyond the former: For in Regard to the Authority of the Person promulg- ing, how much more does the Gospel deserve our Attention? Seeing the Dignity of the Son of God, the Lord from Heaven, speaking himself from Heaven, is infinitely superior to Prophets or An- gels, those promulging Instruments of the Law. There is the Palate for tasting of the Food full of Milk and Honey, of Marrow and Fatness, or for delighting and nourishing the Soul to Life; there must we think of chewing, swallowing, and di- gesting the Creed of Salvation, after it has passed the Confession of the Lips: So is the Make of Man, so is the Will of Christ, our Master, that we should *believe with our Heart unto Righteousness*; that alone being the Way to entertain, and meditate on the Righteousness of Faith, or the Gospel, as it ought.

The Profession is not an *opus operatum*, but a Meditation and Deduction, bringing forth the *Love of God*, and good Works. Yet how many grown People, through an Avocation of Thought, believe only with their Mouths, like their young Children, who can exactly say by Heart the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the ten Commandments; thinking no otherwise of either, but as one Word follows another; tho' not miss a Word, yet enter- tain no Notion how it concerns them. Others, as inconsiderately, yet more frequently, rote over the Principles of their holy Profession; weekly hear- ing, and conversing with them, but not to the good Effects that should follow. And what our Saviour said to his Disciples, after attending a long Time upon his divine Ministry, may be said to them, Mark viii. 21. *How is it that ye do not un- derstand?*

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His Disciples, during his Stay upon Earth, laboured under invincible Prejudices from preconceived Notions of a temporal Messiah; our Lord himself apologizes for them in St. *John* vi. 43. *Why do ye not understand my Speech? Even because ye cannot bear my Word.* But we are free from all such fore-closing Prepossessions: For who among us retains any Prejudice against Life and Heaven, or the plain scriptural Way and Truth thither leading? And as there are prevailing Impediments among us, which make Knowledge and Hearing so superficial and unfruitful.

Let us go on to enquire what are the voluntary Hindrances, the obstructing Reasons, or the bad Manner of performing this Duty of Consideration; that marking them, we may from the Contraries supply ourselves with some Helps to further us in the better Performance of it.

1. There is a slothful, 2. A desultory, or light, 3. A deferring, dilatory Temper of Mind. 4. The Cares and Business of the World: Which are all prejudicial Lets and Obstructions in the regular Discharge of this wise, this efficacious Duty.

1. There is the *slothful* Temper, which is ready to nod over the Concerns of the Soul, and the Affairs of Eternity. These Men battle and discourage their own Spirits with the false Opinion, that the Business of adverting savingly to religious Matters, is an arduous Task; and so decline it, as too great a Burthen. They can make one for Fashion-sake at Church; but as to their Particular, if diverting the Mind is calling it off from serious Things, they never divert theirs at all, because they really never apply them to serious Things: With *Gallio*, they *care for none of these Things*. But is it yet unknown to them, that the slothful Servant in the Parable is in the same Condemnation with the Wicked, and the Hypocrite? I am sure, if it is unknown,

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known, it is merely because such a Passage in the Gospel is unconsidered by them.

But I hope it is not come to that, as yet, as to be debated by them, whether they would be happy or miserable hereafter. To lose so much as one Hour in deliberating about that, is an Hour lost to their Happiness, and so much Time perished from Self-preservation. Let their Danger rouse them out of the Slumber of Ruin. That direful Risk they run, is enough to put a Mind even into mindless Creatures, and almost engross their Attention. A little Attention would indeed be sufficient, to make them feel and find themselves recovered, as from a Lethargy. We must all *work out our Salvation*, that is the Condition, or there is none to be had; and the Reward more than infinitely recompences the Pains of a whole Life. What other Thing of Value is to be had, without first paying down the Price of some Pains and Labour for it? The Cure of this pernicious Hindrance is therefore to resolve upon the Diligence requisite to *make our Calling and Election sure*; to set our Shoulders to the Work, as to what *must* be done; to begin in good earnest, in a full Perswasion of the Truth, that there is nothing of less Pains, or more Pleasure, than to reflect both upon ourselves, and the Ways, and End of heavenly Wisdom; when once we have gained that common Advantage of being *used to it*, which is only wanting in this, as in all other strange, untried Things, for recommending it to our Pains, and endearing it to our close Application, as the dearest Interest that belongs to us.

External Wealth may come to us from the amassing Cares of others before us, that have a Kindness for us; and the Strength, or Beauty of the Body may be ours *ex traduce*, derivatively from Parents. But the Riches, the Strength, the Beauty

of the Mind in the Progress of Virtue, and Favour of God, must be the concurring Business of our *own* Endeavours, and the Produce of our proper Diligence and Circumspection: Every one of us has a Garden under his peculiar Occupation; and we may every one reap, according to our own ordering, Weeds and Beggary, or the best Fruits, and Herbs, and Flowers. Not any, the dearest Friend, can die, or be judged for us; therefore must we every one of us essentially take it upon ourselves to live for ourselves, unto God, and another Life; redeeming past Sloth with doubled Sedulity, and redressing all sauntering, indolent Acknowledgment of a future State, by a more active Circumspection to our Behaviour here. However certain in itself is the World to come, yet if not apprehended as such, in its Exercise and Direction for keeping a *Conscience void of Offence*, it will have no more Power over us than a Fable? Till rational quiescent Principles become practical and habitual, Knowledge is reduced to present Action; our Sloth and Indifference will be only our Damnation to the State of many Stripes.

There is, *2dly*, The *light, desultory* Temper of Mind, which wants to be redress'd; for no Good can come of it, till it is. It considers Things by Halves, Fits, and Starts: Instead of collecting and marshalling the Forces of Thought, it scatters and disbands them; straying to another, from the Point it should be fixed upon; wandering from this to that, visiting every Thing, even Trifles and Amusements; dwelling with no spiritual Consideration long, tho' it never so much imports them. The Man perhaps changes his Affairs and Counsels once a Week, as some do their Clothes, or, it may be, twice in one Day. They would endure to be saved, and attend to it with all their Hearts, if it could be effected by way of Frolick; but

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but to set gravely about it, they utterly detest, as Preciseness. This trifling Gaiety of Spirit is a great Adversary to that salutary Sobriety of Mind, which becomes Christian People.

Suppose some practical Subject, that has Life or Death in its Issue, is to be taken into Deliberation; the heedless Creature, soon weary, courts some Impertinence or other, or suffers some comparative Nothing or other, to break off the important Consultation; and by those constant Intermissions nothing is resolved upon, nothing done: As much to the Reproach of their Character and Judgment, as it would be to a Judge, if you should ever see one, upon a Cause of Life and Death, playing with some of the By-standers, spending and diverting his Attention quite beside the solemn Business before him.

Now the helping Remedy against this careless Evil for prospering the blessed Work of Consideration, is to fix the Operations of the Mind to what it is, and ought to be about, continuing the Dialogue with our own Heart; we and our Bosoms debating Matters together, till the supreme Affair of its Interest is discussed; so long till it is thoroughly apprized of it, sets it down in its Memory in permanent Characters, that it may be frequently recollected, for the better regulating all our Affections, and Actions. The Exercise of the Mind very much resembles that of the Body: If left as soon as begun, this creates no Alteration for the better; but continued for a due Time, brings it into an agreeable, salutary Breathing: So in spiritual Cogitations, if we would rise to the Pulse of spiritual Affections, we must repeat the Cogitation: If we go on with it as the Feet do with the Steps, the Soul will also grow warm with its own Motion, and the Life of the Spirit will be strong and vigorous. For there is nothing so healthful to it as

that Sort of Exercise in good and holy Truths, Your starting off and on any Sort of Subject, generates Thoughts and Actions like itself : But if you desire any Thing steady and solid from your Minds, you must think solidly and seriously of solid and serious Things ; and reiterate the Reflection till the Impression is indelible, and communicates the Print of Heaven to your Conversation : And through a Continuance of these Efforts we shall be able, in this Vale of worldly Business, to cut a Channel for divine Meditations to flow between Heaven and the Soul. We should always command the Eye of the Mind to insist upon its View, when sacred Things are before it ; and not be contented to pass them over with glancing Thoughts, which neither become their Importance, nor affect us at all.

The *Greek* Words in the New Testament *ορνέω, νοέω*, which we translate *understand*, is the active Mood of the Mind : And the Word *ἐπιστάμαι*, which signifies the same, implies, in the Composition, that the Mind ought to stand upon a Thing, in order to know and apprehend its Use and Relation to us : Inasmuch as cursory Consideration, or listening of Course, is like to stand us in no Stead,—And the original Word in the Text for *letting slip*, you see rendered, in the Margin of the Bible, *run out as leaking Vessels*. And to whom can that happen, but through their own Negligence, and profound Forgetfulness ? And what, consequently, will their Vessels be full of, but an empty, vain, wicked World ? As the slothful Temper may be likened to the Highway in the Parable, which was passive enough to the falling of the Seed, but cared not who picked it up, disclaiming all conserving Pains that might have prevented it : So the light Disposition answers the other unfruitful Soil, which received the Word with Joy ; but, through Levity,
and

and Unconstancy of Resolution, was soon offended, disheartened, and fell away.

Now as the desultory Temper is wont to avoid, or evade the proper Times and Seasons for serious Reflection; there is therefore this further Help and Provision against it, *viz.* that we determine with ourselves to be constant Improvers of those recurring Times and Opportunities that are meetest for it. The Soul can no more think of two Things at one and the same Instant, much less such Opposites as the Love of God and this World, than the Body can be in two Places at the same Time. There are therefore daily, and weekly Seasons for our spiritual Things, as there are for our temporal. The weekly is the Lord's Day, when we ought to attend wholly upon this very Thing; solemnly surveying and re-surveying all the Actions of the Week past, what Advances we have made, or what Relapses been guilty of in the Way that we should go; and bosom up as much Religion, and such lively Meditations of Heaven, as may serve all the Week after to keep our Hearts above the World, even while our Hands are dealing in its Affairs. The daily Seasons for serious, improving Reflection, (beside meeting occasional Objects) are Morning, and Evening: God has given us Prudence to judge of the Time according to the Circumstances he has placed us in. The good Psalmist, after he recovered out of his sinful, incogitant State, in respect of which he confesses he was *so foolish and ignorant, even as it had been a Beast* before God, made it his nightly Practice to *commune with his Heart*, and search out his Spirits; and advises others to *commune with theirs in their Chambers*, according to the first Translations; *in their Bed*, according to the latter; and *to be still*, and retired, for that happy Purpose, *Psal. iv. 4.* There let them in Silence, the Candle out, and no

Body to interrupt, nightly give an Account of their daily Deeds, Words, and Thoughts, before the Bar of Conscience. In such a wise Practice, should they die before Morning, the Time was well spent; should they live, was it not profitably lost from Sleep, when such Advantage was made of it for heavenly Wisdom, and for manly Improvement? And as it was the last Thing at Night, so be it, also, the first Business in the Morning, as soon as awake, thus to converse with God and yourself. And thus in all your Business you will begin with God, and end with him.

3dly, There is yet the *procrastinating, deferring* Temper of Mind, which vacates serious Things, and ruins all Religion. Whatever Motives for better Living offer to prevail with Persons of this Disposition, they put them off, and off, to a more convenient Season; which is to be wicked in the most effectual Reality, and become virtuous and reasonable only in Imagination. You will consider To-morrow, you say. What is that but to be a self-condemn'd Fool to Day? To omit all Beginnings, Opportunities, and Occasions of doing Good, and being good? These are not only negatively bad, but positively so, by embracing, in the mean Time, and without Reluctance, the Opportunities and Temptations of perpetrating every customary Wickedness with the more Greediness; and when To-morrow comes, instead of growing better, go on to be worse: That is the constant Event, that is the miserable Confirmation of such undesigning Resolves, which are verily nothing else but the Artifice of the Devil, to divert the present Concern of Mind. Whereas, to begin now, is to lessen both Guilt and Danger, as delaying till another Time is the certain Increase of both.

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There is no Manner of Jest, or Truth of Common Sense in those future Resolves, if you will but repass in your Minds how many Absurdities are involved therein. 1st, It implies, that we will live without Reason To-day, because we defer having it till To-morrow. 2dly, It audaciously contravenes and prophanes the Commandment of God, which bids us, *this Day, if we would bear his Voice, not to harden your Hearts*; but to soften, to listen, and repent. To-day is to take the Veil from our Eyes, that we may behold *how kind God is in his Law*; how kinder in sending his Son to be a Propitiation for our Sins; but kindest of all, in his Patience and Long-suffering, in not cutting us off Yesterday in Impenitence. 3dly, It presumes upon Life To-morrow; which is the Stupidity of divesting one's self of Being for To-day, by divesting the Man of proper Care and Provision for it. You will To-morrow be the Creature God made you, such as will consider the Safety and Enjoyment of his Being connected to a future State; which is to be a Brute To-day. But who can warrant your Life To-morrow? How know you otherwise, and why do you not fear, therefore, lest that Alarm ring in your Ears, *Thou Fool, this Night thy Soul shall be required of thee*.

Have you, Presumer, to the utmost tried a gracious long-suffering God; and has he, beyond your Expectation, at least, infinitely beyond your Desert, granted you another Day of Life, and that is this very Day, and will you not lay hold of it? It presumes upon a better Inclination To-morrow; though being baffled and more scared To-day, it is morally certain to be more dilatory and impotent to the Work To-morrow, and less sensible of Danger. I name not all; for who can count them up? But by what I have hinted, you see what a dreadful Conspiracy of Follies, Absurdities, and Perils, equally repugnant to Reason as to Religion, en-

environs the Man who indulges himself in Procrastination. This was the Ruin of *Felix* the Governor, and from the Scepter to the Spade will end in the Confusion of all those that put their Trust in it for Salvation.

If not to think, or consider at all, or in other Words, to defer it till To-morrow, was the true Method to delay the Approach of these Evils and Dangers, or to promote your Escape from them, then would I be the first to advise that Expedient. But as the contrary is the only Way to be on the reasonable and safe Side, I am obliged in the Bowels of Love, to excite you to *give the more earnest Heed*, to embrace in Earnest, and without Delay, the Word of Life in your thoughtful Minds, and water the Seed of it with serious Consideration; and after Recollection, to allow a sober Advertence to the mighty Proposals of Religion, to make Inquisition into your Hearts, advise with your own Knowledge, advise with your Experience from others Ruin, exert the Convictions of your Judgment, and be adjured by the Terrors and Uneasiness of your own Conscience, to throw off the Burthen of your Guilt by confessing your past Follies, and turning to the Lord, lamenting that you began no sooner, and have so long been *more brutish than any Man, having not the Understanding of a Man*; but now resolving no more to alienate that noble Faculty from its proper Use in human Service, a rational Appearance, nor abuse it any more with the ruinous Delusion of saying, *We will bear thee again of this Matter*; which is always to have a future religious Understanding, and never any Sense or Religion for the present.

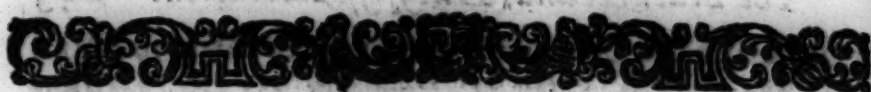
Was I talking to your sensual Appetites, or your favourite Prejudices, neither of them, I should conclude, have Ears to hear; but when I address myself to your Faculty of Reason and Consideration, I hope

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I hope I have prevailed with you to carry in Mind the Maxim of Solomon, *Proverbs xix. 8. He that keepeth his Understanding, i. e. free from Hindrance, shall find Good*; always practising the Caution of our blessed Master in Heaven, *Take Heed how you bear*. And may you profit so well at this Time by the Remedies against these Evils, as entirely to throw off the slothful, the desultory, and the procrastinating Temper of Mind, and never once more suffer those damnable Obstructions to interpose between you and your eternal Felicity.



SER-



S E R M O N

The Sixteenth.

Ignorance, or Good Intention, will not excuse a guilty Zeal. St. Paul's Sincerity stated.

J O H. xvi. 2.

They shall put you out of their Synagogues ; yea, the Time cometh, that whoever killeth you, will think that he doth God Service.

TH E great Causes of Mischief in the World are the ungoverned Passions of Men : But of all the Passions, that of Zeal for God and his Religion is the most pernicious and ungovernable, as oftⁿ as it exceeds in Degree, acts contrary to its proper Rule and Measure, or in Ignorance of it. Nothing has yet been found, of all the Incentives to human Action, so much to disturb the Peace of the World, the Order and Regularity of its Constitutions, and violate the Rights of Mankind, Temporal as well as Spiritual, as this has actually done at divers Times, and in most Countries. The *Anger* thereof is fierce, and its *Wrath* cruel. Of all Hatreds, none more furious and unnatural than that which the Diversity of Religion falsely and perversly inspires. Yet nothing is more notorious, than that the

the Design of the Christian Institution, in all its Precepts and Injunctions, is to prevent Harm and Injury in the World, and to promote Harmony and Good-will among Men, and do Good every where. Notwithstanding all this, in Contradiction to its Rules and Authority, it has been, and still is the Occasion and Pretence, the chief Ground and Reason of so much Bitterness and Variance, Persecutions, Violence, and Blood-shedding.

I might say of every Injury that the Heart of Man conceives, or his Hands execute, it would be incredible in Theory, to ourselves, and to a *Turk* or Heathen, reading the Christian's Gospel abstractedly from their Variances and mutual Hatreds; impossible, if it was not so tragically and lamentably, and so frequently true in Fact. And when Religion divides Men's Minds, and Zeal makes the Breach, not the common Ties of Kin, not the common Interest of Countrymen, nor yet the Affinities in Blood, are strong enough to reconcile and unite them.

But this proceeds from false Notions of God and Religion, through Ignorance and Inconsideration of the Nature of the one and of the other: Or else, the cunning Hypocrisy of the worldly Passions of Men, putting on the Disguise of Religion and Conscience, the better to accomplish their worldly Ends. When the Operations are actuated by either of these Causes, what a dangerous and killing Evil is it? What Havock and Disturbance will it not occasion, and rejoice at when it is done? The last, having no Religion at all, will not scruple to break through any of the Commandments which happen to stand in the Way of his selfish Designs, whenever he can skreen himself so; and it takes with his Neighbours, equally mistaken, that it is all done for the Glory of God.

Nay,

Nay, it must in Consequence follow, the more extravagant and excessive the Activity of this Zeal is, the more commendable it will be thought ; for nothing can be too much for God ! 'Tis only deemed an higher Act of Religion, when it once comes to be apprehended that all who serve God in a different Way from ourselves, are Enemies to him and his Religion ; and, that it is a Matter of Conscience, and an obliging Duty to him, to be as injurious and destructive to them as we can : Or, in the Words of our Saviour now read, *Whoever killeth you, will think that he doeth God Service.* This furious Spirit of Zeal appeared to the Accomplishment of our Lord's Prediction, the Time *cometh.* It did really actuate the *Jews* to all Manner of Barbarity at that Time ; and perhaps from that Time has had the same Effect among Christians. Their Murders, Massacrees, Racks, Prisons, Gallies, and other Methods of Cruelties exercised on one another, have they not exceeded the Slaughter which the Christian Name formerly suffered from *Jews* and Heathens ?

Avert thy Wrath, suspend thy Judgment, O Father of Mercies, whilst thou lookest down upon us Christians, who are of the same Family and Household ! Who ought to be knit together in a Religion which is the very Bond of Peace, and of all Manner of Love ! Thy holy Child *Jesus* has told us, indeed, that he came *not to send Peace, but Sword* and Variance upon Earth. But these Words, we believe, were spoken because it was fore-known they would be eventually true from the Passions of Men ; not that the Coming of the Prince of Peace did in any sort occasion Bloodshed among them, but their own wicked Dispositions. This, therefore he foretold, that when it came to pass his Disciples *might believe it was he,* and take
Heart

Heart from that Thought, that he who was able to foretel, was able to succour.

When that which is the only Remedy becomes itself the Disease, through the Perverseness of Men; and that holy Religion which was given to direct and regulate Men's Zeal, becomes itself the Incendiary, and throws in Fuel to foment it, it is no wonder it rages to Excess, and that its Extravagances are manifold, and without Bounds. But whence such an inconsistent Passion for the Glory of God proceeds, as inspires Men to break God's Laws in pure Obedience to them, and turns Murder, the worst of all Guilt, into a *Sacrifice acceptable to God*, an Oblation meritorious in the Actors, whilst it is all the while the Service of the Devil, and the Height of Wickedness! Whence, I say, should this worst of Corruption proceed, but from that Cause principally which our Lord assigns after the Text: *This they will do, because they have not known the Father, nor me.*

As therefore nothing in the World is of more fatal Consequence than a warm misguided Zeal; so it concerns Men the most of any Thing not to be mistaken in it, but to hold it in with the Bit and Bridle of its Duty, lest it fall upon the Rights of others. There is the Virtue and the Vice of Zeal: And there is nothing whatever, which Men of all Persuasions are more apt to confound, and be mistaken in, than their Opinions and Actions according to it. The misplacing of it on an undue Object, or not proportioning it in a proper Degree, or not prosecuting it in a rightful Manner, has occasioned a World of Calamity and Sin. In order, therefore, to moderate this godly Passion with the Restraints which Religion puts upon it, and keep it within the Limits which God himself has confined it to; I shall enquire into two Things:

I. How

- I. How far Ignorance or a good Intention will excuse its Irregularities.
- II. What is the Object, Degree, and Measures of that religious Zeal which is a Duty.

I. How far Ignorance, or a good Intention, will excuse its Irregularities. St. Paul bears Record of these persecuting Jews, that they had a Zeal for God, but not according to Knowledge: They proceeded to all that Violence against Christians, out of an inconsiderate unjustifiable Intention of serving and pleasing God. He testifies and confesses of himself, that *he verily thought with himself that he ought to do many Things against the Name of Jesus of Nazareth*: And, according to this Persuasion of his Conscience, he breathed out Slaughter and Threatenings against the Disciples, haul'd Men and Women to Prison, being *exceedingly mad against them*, and determined to destroy them that called on the Name of Jesus. He seems to be of a warm Disposition by his natural Constitution, but the fiery Genius and uncharitable Doctrine of the Sect of the Pharisees, in which he was brought up, heated him to such a Degree as to make him lose all Temper, and moral Consideration what he was doing; he was in a Fever of Mind: But does he go about to justify the Barbarity of his Doings from the Intention that influenced them? No. Does he call in the godly End he had in View to absolve the ungodly Means? Not at all: The more he reflected upon his past Proceedings, he grows more conscious of his Guilt, and arraigns himself of the Crimes of Blasphemy and Persecution. For what greater Blasphemy and Prophanation of God and his Religion, than to commit the worst of Wickedness and Injuries under their Banner? He was *exceeding mad against the Christians*, and declares,

(1 Tim.

(1 Tim. i. 13.) that *beyond Measure* he persecuted the Church of God, and wasted it; and all because he was exceeding zealous of the Tradition of the Elders.

Thus the *Traditions of Men* made void the Commandment of God, even the great Things of the Law, Mercy and Justice to Men. The Hurry and the Impetuosity of his mighty Zeal put out the very Light of Nature. For otherwise, the very Light of Nature would have arrested his Consideration, and taught him to distinguish better between Good and Evil. Can it possibly be good to commit the cruellest Violence and Outrage in the World, contrary to the Dictates of Reason, and abhorrent to Humanity, merely because another is of that Religion which his Conscience, and Examination of Things, tells him is right? — Why should I kill him because he thinks himself as wise as me, and perhaps is a great deal wiser? Whilst I take him to be in a speculative Error, and so endeavour to knock out those Brains that entertain it, he is sure that I must be in the Wrong in taking such a barbarous Step, Nay, he, and all the World, may be sure, moreover, that I am a Fool for my Pains, for thinking to make Converts of Free-Agents by Force, and proposing to recommend my supposed Truth by Ways and Methods that are sure to procure it Abhorrence. Does his being of my Opinion add any thing to my Salvation, or does his differing from me, in his own private Right of judging for himself, take any Thing from it? What Provocation does he give me? Why then should I have a Hand to execute so infamous and inhuman a Harm to him? Tho' I am an Instrument acting by Order of the *Sanhedrim*, who are resolved to maintain their Jurisdiction at any Rate, *when the Messiah*, spoken of by *Moses* and the Prophets, which I have

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studied,

studied, *is actually come into the World, can he do greater Miracles than what this Man, who calls himself the Messiah, did every where* in the Face of the World? Ten thousand Witnesses agree that such Things were done, no one contradicting? Why then was I so brutish and precipitant, as not to take that into Consideration? Where was my Reason and Judgment, that I did not examine the Doctrines he proposed, with the Evidence and Attestation it carried; the Life that he led, and the Death that he died? Why did I not compare them with what the Prophets have said of him, and the Marks and Characters they figure him by? Certain it is, had I done this Justice and Truth to him, he would not have been found a Destroyer, but a Fulfiller of that Law which I am so zealous of. I should have found that the Traditions of my Fathers, whether Oral or Written, for which I retain so vast a Veneration, had frustrated and corrupted the Commandment of God; that they had put their selfish temporal Glosses upon the Word of God, contradictory to the authentick Prophecies; making him a temporal conquering King, who was no other than a spiritual peaceable one.

My contemporary Pharisees agree to say the same Things, because their worldly Interest would have it so: Their Fears of losing the Grandeur they were possess'd of, the Authority of prescribing Terms of Salvation to the People which they had usurp'd, made them blind to Miracles, deaf to the Consideration of all the Conviction that could be given: But why should I, who knew in my Heart that I propose nothing but the Advancement of the Glory of God, and the simple Discharge of my Duty, not have considered better of it? and not have been so unreasonably averse to the greatest Goodness, and the greatest Truth in the World? I saw that the Fear of Excommunication, or having their
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Names cast out of the Synagogue, of being delivered over to Infamy and Contempt, made a great many Well-wishers to Christ only the more cautious how they profess'd themselves for him : But yet those Methods could not change the Truth, nor the powerful Convictions of Peoples Minds.— Seeing these Proceedings, I must ever be of Opinion that the very best of Men are liable to be excommunicated by the worst. I was once in Concert with them ; and for that, and other Persecutions of the Church of God, do stile myself, as having been one of them, *the greatest of Sinners.*

Did the *Sanhedrim* issue out their Orders for what I did ? But how could they change Evil into Good ? Who gave them that Authority ? Why then did I obey ? Or did I those savage Violations officiously to ingratiate myself, and please the worldly-minded Pharisees ? That makes it still worse. Does not Nature declare and distinguish the good Tree from the bad by its Fruits ? Were my Fruits so notoriously bad ? What was I then and my Perswasion ? Who possessed me to think and act so strangely wrong ? Even that insatiating Zeal, which is the Author of most of the worst Wrongs that are committed. My Intention was Zeal for God. My Works flowing from it were the Works of the Devil. Just so might the Devil be said to serve God, if it was possible for him to have intended and designed it, as much as myself. But, God knows my Heart, I did intend and design his Glory. Whatever I did in my Madnels I accuse myself of in Sincerity before God and Man ; of wilfully contemning, despitefully using those Means of Information which God gave me, so fair an Opportunity for setting myself right ; and as oft' as I think thereon, I must with Compunction condemn myself, and acquit God for condemning

me, after such an obstinate Sin, and presumptuous Defect of Sincerity towards his Truth and Instruction. Had it pleased him, I had died without seeing my Crime, or growing sensible of the pious Phrensy I was in. But it pleased his divine Compassion, and the Designs of his Wisdom, in making use of me, to shew me Mercy, the Mercy to be informed and illuminated, to come to myself in so extraordinary a Way, as none other are ever to expect.

Because *he did it ignorantly, and in Unbelief*, and his being *a chosen Vessel*, were the Grounds that moved God to convert St. Paul in such a supernatural Manner; and find him a better Cause and more lawful Methods for his natural Zeal and learned Qualifications to work upon. And thus God, who can bring Good out of Evil, and the higher Promotion of his Designs out of Men's Opposition to them, made this great Apostle the more successful in converting (after he himself was so suddenly converted) to the Admiration of all Men; from Persecution, to assist and join it; from destroying to cherish, from binding, imprisoning, and slaughtering, to go into Bonds, into Prison, and unto Death for its Sake.

In regard to the Question that has of late been so much controverted, concerning the Sincerity of this Apostle, I am of Opinion, That his doing what he did in Ignorance and Unbelief, was all the Sincerity that was found in him; and that all was but half of what he ought to have exerted, towards justifying him before God: For he ought to have been as zealous and intent in using the Means of informing himself of the Rectitude of those Principles his Conscience acted on, as insincerely doing those this Actions consequent to them. He laid it down as his governing Principle, that persecuting
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and destroying all that *called upon the Name of Jesus*, was the Way to serve God, and therefore his Duty : But that he was rash and insincere, in chusing such a Principle to go by, cannot be denied : But after he had chose it, he acted sincerely and consistently with that and his Conscience, in making that sad Havock of the Church which he did. When he says in his Apology before the Jews, Act. xxiii. 1. *I have lived in all good Conscience before God until this Day* ; it implied that it was good to follow the Dictates of his Conscience, as formerly in persecuting, so now in preaching Christ : He was ever honest in doing that which he thought his Duty : His Speech and Action were all of a Piece with his inward Persuasion. To do that which is really wrong against the Dictates of one's Mind, is to offend maliciously, and add Hypocrisy to Sin. To do the same Thing under a false Notion of its being right, is a Fault, but less in Guilt than the other. Therefore is St. Paul's doing the Wrong ignorantly, and in Unbelief, brought in only in Mitigation of his Crime, that it was not so great as if he had acted the same Part against the Persuasion of his Conscience : It is so far from being alledged by himself as a Defence of what he had done, as if his good Intentions could justify his bad Actions, that upon Reflection he sentences himself as a *Blasphemer, injurious* for the Time past ; and had not his Conscience been thus powerfully awakened, his Principles and Judgment sat right, which before had led him wrong ; had not that excellent Disposition of his for serving God, and promoting his Truth and Honour, been changed into the acceptable lawful Methods of doing it ; had he still gone on to persecute, had only provoked the more, the more zealous he was to serve and please him in so proposterous and incogitant a Way ; he must with all his godly In-

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tention have suffered hereafter, as a Sinner, for neglecting to bring the Eye of his Mind, and the Guide of his Life, his Conscience, to that which ought ever to be the Rule and Regulator of it, viz. the Word of God, and right Reason.—

In like Manner, the *Jews* were guilty, and exhorted to repent of their ignorant Zeal and cruel Treatment of the Master, as those in the Text of what they had committed against the Disciples and Followers. Tho' they are said to have *killed the Lord of Life through Ignorance*, yet it was affirmed to their Faces, that it was with *wicked Hands they crucified and slew him*, and that they *were the Betrayers and Murderers of the Just one*.—Without Repentance, neither their Ignorance, nor the Mistakes of their Conscience, would save them from Condemnation; because it was their Crime to be so ignorant and mistaken, when a fair Consideration of Things (which was in their Power) might easily have cured them of the fatal Error, and brought them into the *Way everlasting*.

St. Peter was very zealous for his Master's Honour and Safety, and through a furious Impulse of his Zeal, draws his Sword, lays about him, and cuts off the Ear that he ought to have argued the Case with. This he did before he was well versed in the Nature of his Lord's Kingdom. But did his Lord approve of the Violence? No: He rebuked him soundly for it.—*Uzzah* had a flaming Fit of Zeal came upon him: He saw the Ark of the Lord tottering, and grew so jealous of the Danger of the Church, that he must needs be meddling with Things he had nothing to do with as a private Man; nay, was debarr'd from by an express Command. But what did he get by it? Did he settle the Church by it? Or was he not struck dead for his Presumption, and fell a Sacrifice to

the Flames of his own kindling? King *Saul* was more refractory to the Command given him in Charge. Did not God, that gave it, know best what made most for his own Glory, and what Sacrifices and Services he had most mind to? Must *Saul* set up to be wiser than God and his Prophet, and pretend to direct them what ought to be commanded, and what dispensed with? *Behold to obey is better than to sacrifice; and to hearken to God, and his Prophet, than the Fat of Rams.* And what did he get by his mistaken Zeal against the Lord his God, but the Loss of his Kingdom?

So that we see, from an Induction of Instances, both how apt Zeal is to be mistaken, and how full of Guilt and Danger these Mistakes are, to those that are possessed of them through not duly considering the Rule of their Duty. Plain it is, that a good End, tho' the best in the World, will not sanctify the Badness, or ill Quality of the Means, nor indemnify the Actors from Guilt; nor will the Goodness of the Intention warrant or excuse an apparently bad Action, as long as it is our Duty *not to do Evil that Good may come of it.*

The hurtful Ignorance and Mistakes of Zeal and Conscience, are insufficient to justify a Man, as long as he is bound to be sincere in informing his Conscience by the Word of God, and directing his Zeal according to the Knowledge of that, and the Nature of Things. For our Ignorance and Inconsideration of a Law sufficiently promulged to us, can never be enough to supersede its Obligation upon us: Nor will our false Conceits, mistaken Opinions, or the best Purposes of the Heart, be ever able to change the Nature of Good and Evil, which are immutably founded in the Nature of Things, and certified in the Word of God; neither abate any Thing of the Power of a positive Law of God upon our Conduct and Actions; because

they are both antecedent to us, and independent of our Power to alter. They will not comply with our Humour and Fancies; we must submit our Judgment, and comply in our Actions to them, as ever we hope to do that which is lawful and right.

We perceive, therefore, of how vast Consequence it is to the Welfare of People's Souls, and the Peace of the World, that our Consciences be rightly informed in the proper Matter of Religion, Zeal, the Degrees it should observe, the Limits it should not exceed, and the Ways it ought to decline.—Almost every Age has seen the greatest Wickedness perpetrated under the sacred Pretence of Conscience; there is no Excess, no enthusiastick Extravagance, which an unguided Zeal may not run Men into, when it once comes to allow for Men's Immorality. It is the Principle of all Wickedness, and fraught with all manner of Iniquity: And there is nothing so devilish, but God shall be called in to patronize, to that Degree of Infatuation, as that Murther shall pass for an Act of Faith, and devoted Service to him. Whence comes all this to pass, but because, as *ours is a God gracious and merciful, long-suffering, and of great Kindness; that his Mercy is over all his Works; and he the common Parent of us all; they have not known the Father, nor Jesus Christ?*

If the Brother, whom I hate so much on account of Religion, is as dear to him as myself, and lives by the same Indulgence of his good Providence as I do; why should I be for exterminating him, whom God is for preserving, and I can shew no Command from him for so much as hurting? God deals with us all as rational and free Agents, reasoning the Case of the Equity of his Laws in propounding our own Interest, what we may escape, and what we may get, in order to induce our Submission to them; and why should I oppose his Methods

Methods for dealing otherwise with my Brother? He is full of Goodness, and Long-suffering, leading Men to Repentance: So let the Gentleness of my Treatment, and the Goodness of my Truth, induce my erroneous Brother to repent of his Error, and forsake it: And let the merciless, injurious Bigot know, that to think *God altogether such a one as himself*, is to think wickedly of God. And as they know not God, so,

2dly, They know not the Son neither, who think and act at that Rate: So contrary is it to the Knowledge of him, and his Religion, that it makes a very Wolf of the Lamb of God, and changes the Dove-like Harmlessness which it prescribes, into the cruel Tearings of ravening Vultures, and the continual Violences, and bloody Course of Life of Birds of Prey. Who can pretend to the Authority of his Example, or of any of his Precepts, for such sort of Usage? Will they declare religious War, with the prohibiting Badge of the Prince of Peace upon them? Or will they make the Declaration of his own Design of coming into this World to save Men's Lives, the Ground and Reason of destroying them? Will they put on *Wrath and Variance, Clamour and evil Speaking, Cruelty and Revenge*, in Virtue of those express Cautions to lay them aside, and in Defiance of so many Prohibitions against them? Or will they take out a Commission to exasperate and revile, to curse and damn, to hate and destroy one another, from any, or from which of those innumerable Precepts, enforced with Variety of Motives, that would inspire us all with Love, Good-will, Forgiveness, Meekness, Long-suffering, Forbearance, Peaceableness, to pray for the Happiness of all Men, of the very Enemies that curse us?

If these are the Institutions of Christ, and the Designs of his holy Religion, how ignorant or forgetful

getful of, or how malicious against both, must they be, who take to any sanguinary, any persecuting, any compulsive Methods of working Conversions, and bringing them over to the Truth? Can they possibly save People whether they will or no? Or ever win their Souls over by hating their Bodies? Will they inflict People's Welfare upon them, instead of insinuating it? How many Absurdities are these against human Nature, as well as contradictory to Christianity? How distant and estranged are such Proceedings from that *Wisdom from above*, which is *pure, peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated*?

But here is our Misfortune: The Passions, or Mistakes, or private Interest of Men, are excessively nimble and vigilant to intermix with the other, and sanctify themselves in the holy Name of Zeal for God and his Religion. These we know do most fatally blind Men, and seduce their Judgments in what makes most for the Honour of God, and the Interest of his Religion. So it comes to pass, that our Zeal is so oft *without Knowledge*, without Consideration and Discretion; and for that Reason becomes excessive and extravagant where it ought to be remiss and cool; and again remiss, where it ought to be most ardently engaged. This holy Religion, which God has planted among us, and which, according to its Nature, ought to be the closest Cement of Charity, is now, on the contrary, made the Bone of the widest Contention and Division, unreasonable, endless Disputes about the Circumstances of it, which hath sometimes heightened the Strife so far, as almost to destroy the very Essentials of it, and extinguish Christianity itself, at least as to those princely Duties of brotherly Love and Charity; whereby, it is to be feared, we not only divide ourselves from each other, but also from God, to whom we can never be truly united

nited, unless we are also by true Charity united to each other. To be very zealous for God's Glory, and at the same Time very uncharitable to our Brother, is to make *God a Lyar; and we deceive ourselves, and the Truth is not in us.*

We proceed in those little Disputes so irreligiously, as if an inflexible Concern for or against the mutable Circumstances of Religion was indeed an effectual Dispensation from Charity, or any other of its important, immutable Duties; and that Zeal which should be expended in promoting true Piety, and the divine Life, which are most unquestionably well-pleasing to God, and make most for his Honour, and are most enjoined and insisted on for that Reason by him, is unfortunately, is sinfully diverted, and squandered away, for the greatest Part, in Heats and Wrangles among ourselves about the lesser Things.

Here, then, is the first pacifick Business of our Knowledge, which is to regulate our Zeal, that we may proportion the Degrees of it according as the Objects deserve it. The Way to preserve our Zeal, and with that its Governor Knowledge or Prudence, from being called in Question, is to exert it upon Things unquestionably good, and against Things unquestionably evil. To shew no good Conscience for the Virtues of the Christian Conversation, nor any Regard to the Substance of Religion, but live in the most impious Perjury to screen themselves from worldly Inconveniencies, delighting in a damnable Hatred, and the bitterest Calumnies against their Brother, and many other the loosest Immoralities; and, at the same Time, to shew a Strictness and Adherence to the external Rites of Religion, to a Degree of Fury and Madness; is to give external Proofs of either the grossest Ignorance of the Nature and Design of Religion, as if it essentially or rather only consisted in those Matters; or else of

a scandalous Hypocrisy, that has no Religion at all at the Bottom. Or, on the other Hand, to be inflexible and outrageous against complying with those indifferent Things, and, at the same Time they *strain at a Gnat, to overlook Mercy, Justice, Order, Charity, Unity, to swallow a Camel*; is an equally shameful Misapplication, and Waste of Zeal. So necessary is it to learn to distinguish what are the substantial, and what the circumstantial Things of Religion, in order to proportion our Zeal.

There are some Things in Religion of undoubted Goodness and Excellency, without which we cannot possibly be good ourselves, nor accepted of God: Such are the fundamental Truths of our holy Faith, and an obedient holy Life answerable to it, in all the Duties of Piety, Mercy, Justice, and Charity. These are the *great Things of the Law*: On these we should do well to employ more of our religious Zeal than we usually do, and call it more off from smaller Things, to turn it against our Sins, and the Amendment of our Lives, the doing all those Things which may *glorify our Father which is in Heaven*. In these weighty Matters our Zeal can never exceed; neither can we be remiss, indifferent, or unconcerned in them, without manifest Sin.

It is likewise confessed that there are other Matters, of an indifferent Nature, which may be changed without Sin, and likewise complied with without offending God: For Instance, the Modes and Ceremonies of Worship. Now to employ as much Zeal; for these on one Hand, or against them on the other, as on the Substance of Religion itself, is certainly an irregular Exercise, a most mischievous Excess of Zeal, which ought ever to be proportioned in the Degree of its Fervour and Warmth, according to the Moment of the Things. Yet
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how generally is this transgressed and neglected, to the provoking one another, and disordering the Peace of the World, by the Stainings of ungovern'd Zeal; whilst some place all Religion in Compliance with them, as if that would commute for their Singularity, and cover all Faults; mistaking their own earthly Aims in a formal Attendance on them, and a furious Passion against others all the Time, for a true Zeal for God and his Religion? As long as those Externals are not to be left undone, it is confessed we are allowed to be concerned in a Measure suitable to the Thing's Indifference, but always in the Sphere of Love and Meekness: Whereas with many People, Things innocent in themselves in the Worship of God, presently become unlawful because enjoined by lawful Authority? Do they make that the Reason for not submitting, because commanded? Never was Refusal more absurd. If there is any Protestant Zeal according to Knowledge, and Zeal blamed for not being so, surely theirs deserves it. It is not sufficient to follow their Conscience, unless they also take all due Care to inform it right by the Word of God, by the Reason of Things, divesting themselves of all Prejudices, fairly weighing the Peace of the Church, the Obligations to maintain it, the Mischief of disturbing it, together with the Duty of submitting to Governors in lawful Things; would they impartially compare these important Things with the other small, indifferent ones, one would think it, in a Manner, impossible they should prefer these Trifles before the other. For without ballancing the Moment of Things, and examining into them, a mistaken Conscience may easily delude Men, may excite their Zeal in opposing such innocent Things as Impositions, which are not only lawful, but expedient, and in general so necessary, that no Christian whatsoever can possibly subsist without some kind

kind of them. Yet we ought in Charity to believe that many of those who do thus, for want of better Information, do really in their Consciences reckon their own Zeal in these Things to be a *Zeal for God*; tho' it is most certainly *not according to Knowledge*, but greatly mistaken at least, to say no worse.

Thus we have seen the Necessity of placing and applying our Zeal right, and of proportioning it in Degree, according to the Importance and Worth of the Object it is employed upon; and likewise the Danger and Mischief of its being mistaken. Conclude we now with a firm Resolution (praying God to assist it) to approve ourselves of that *peculiar People*, who are *zealous only of good Works*, and that in Matters of less Moment our *Moderation shall be known unto all Men*.



SERMON

The Seventeenth.

*The Obligations and Motives to retrieve
the Practice of friendly Correction.*

LEV. xix. 17.

— *Thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy Neighbour,
and not suffer Sin upon him.*

WE have in these Words a peremptory Injunction of a very beneficial, tho' very much disregarded Duty, viz. that of friendly Correction, or brotherly Admonition and Rebuke for the Faults we see our Neighbour guilty of. The Text binds the Practice of it upon us in an emphatical and indispensable Manner, and in such forcible Expressions, as seem to silence and exclude all Excuse: *Thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy Neighbour*; and there's no gainsaying. See then to the Manner of performing: For not only *Moses*, and the Prophets, but also *Christ*, and his Apostles, have made it obligatory in many Precepts, and explained it in several Directions. *If all Scripture is profitable for Instruction*, this that I have read unto you, is particularly so, since it engages us to instruct and reprove one another, and so prudently to advise and reprehend our Neighbour, as not to suffer Sin upon him. But this

this Duty, by one ill Means or other, is fallen into general Disuse; either through Forgetfulness of the Command, and the Expediency and Benefit of it; or a faulty Notion of Civility, or a wrong Manner of performing it: For it is a tender, and a difficult Duty, to all Persons, not to be attempted rashly or rudely, nor by every Person, nor at all Times and Seasons; but it must be rightly circumstanced, else it may do more Harm than Good: The whole Success depends upon the skilful Address of reproving, and the prudent Method of finding Fault: I will therefore, at this Time, advise with you, in the

First Place, about the Obligation and Motives for retrieving the Practice of this Duty.

Secondly, The due Manner of discharging it.

First, Be pleased to take into your Consideration the Obligation. I freely profess to you, that the Care of Reprehension ought not to be wholly restrained to that Order of Men who are the publick Reprovers of Sin and Wickedness; and that if it is wholly limited to, and thrown upon us Preachers, it is a mighty culpable Neglect; as I shall make appear, with respect to those who do not make use of the Authority they have, for privately admonishing those whom they might probably make better by such a friendly Conference and Reproof. It may be thought too much for our Order to take this private Office upon us, seeing we have a publick Opportunity once a Week, or oftener, to call Men's Sins to Remembrance, and endeavour their Conversion and Amendment. We would therefore not be wanting to this Part of our Instructions, in stirring up Men among yourselves to help forward this great and needful Work, which is, in Truth, the Work of God, because it is his Will and Commandment that ye should be so employed. All Christian

ftian People have received a Character in ordinary, and are actually invested with an Authority which both justifies and requires the Undertaking. The Scripture ordains and puts every one in Orders for performing this private Duty, who is in any Capacity for it. Whoever thinks it too much for us to preach every Lord's Day, may, if they please, be so aiding to our Endeavours to carry on the admonishing Employment every Day in the Week after; for all will be little enough for making Men good; we should be very glad of all Auxiliaries, to carry on the most arduous, the most backward Business in this World, in respect to Success, *i. e.* the forming Men's Conversations, saving their Lives from Destruction, and making them meet to be *Partakers of the Inheritance of the Saints in Light*, and of restoring to its due Vigour and Efficacy the languishing Sense and Practice of Godliness and Devotion, the faint Influence of Christianity, and of the other Life; teaching one another so to sanctify their Lives, that they may be all such *as becomes the Gospel of Christ*. This, my Christian Brethren, is a Business we would exhort you all to, and be glad of Help to carry on; not only in Behalf of yourselves, but of others your Neighbours also.

As much out of Fashion as these good Offices are, it is not a Matter indifferent, whether they are performed by us, or not: For God has in his holy Scripture so solemnly, so plainly, and so frequently required those pious Endeavours from all those who *fear him, and love their Brother*, that they bind us with an indispensable Obligation; and we can no longer be innocent (however we have been mistaken hitherto) in neglecting it wholly. All I can find left to our Discretion is, that we proceed with Prudence, and Observation of the fittest Seasons and Circumstances, when this Charity may be most effectual: And this rather ratifies and explains the

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Duty,

Duty, than vacates it. For does God ever require any Thing in vain, or ever exact what is impossible, or unprofitable, from us? Hear we then some other of his divine Commands and Authorities, at present; and I shall produce some more in the Sequel of this Discourse: As where he saith, *Have no Fellowship with the unfruitful Works of Darknes, but rather reprove them.* Let us consider one another to provoke unto Love and good Works: Let us have Compassion on the Ignorant, and them that are out of the Way, for that ye yourselves also are compassed with Infirmitie. If a Man be overtaken with a Fault, ye which are spiritual restore such a one in the Spirit of Meekness. Strengthen ye the weak Hands, and comfort him that is weary, and let thy Words uphold him that is falling. Instruct those that impose upon themselves; cause them to understand wherein they have erred, and make them know the Certainty of the Words of Truth; that they that murmur may learn Doctrine: For how forcible are the Words of Truth? Exhort one another daily, while it is called To-day, lest any of you be barded by the Deceitfulness of Sin. Be not negligent to put one another always in Remembrance of those Things which appertain unto Life and Godliness, tho' ye know them, and be established in the present Truth. Ye also that are full of Goodness, and filled with all Knowledge, admonish one another; warn them that are unruly. If any Man obey not the Word, note that Man, and have no Company with him, that he may be ashamed; yet count him not as an Enemy, but admonish him as a Brother. He that refuseth Reproof erreth, he that hateth it is brutish: But he that regardeth it shall be honoured.

Half these Passages and Injunctions were enough to convince you that this is no trivial Concern, nor an incidental Advice; tho' I have not yet mentioned the Half of what might be quoted from holy

Writ,

Writ, by the Way of correcting different Things amiss in our Brother ; as his Error, his Ignorance, or his Sin ; directing not only the Reprover, but him that is reprov'd how to bear, and make his Advantage of it ; and all declare this, at the least, that it is extremely much the Desire of God, and most clearly and evidently his holy Will and Pleasure, that we be not defective in this our Obedience ; but take Notice to do it at our Peril, when any Likelihood of Success, and convenient Opportunity offers : And it shews, withal, how foolish and ignorant we have been before him, as many as have been careless, and neglectful of this Charge : How we can excuse ourselves in a wilful, continued Neglect, I find not : For those Scriptures which carry a seeming Objection, they will not be sufficient to absolve us ; such as forbid us *to judge our Brother*, because by his *own Master he standeth or falleth* ; and many such like Cautions : For the Observation thereof is perfectly consistent with the Duty we are recommending ; the Intention of such Rules and Precautions being only in Matters of doubtful Report or Action ; that we be not over-hasty to judge on the uncharitable Side ; that we traduce and lessen not our Brother's good Name ; but then it hinders not, if he has trespassed against you, or against God, in any enormous Manner, from telling him of it in a prudent and friendly Way. So our Saviour positively directs, Mat. xviii. 15. *If thy Brother trespass against thee, tell him his Fault between you and him alone ; if he hear thee, thou hast gained thy Brother.* And so well does this Duty consist, with regard to the other, of not judging or speaking ill of our Brother, that it seems to be the best Manner of performing it by a kindly acquainting our Neighbour what Evil is said of him, and giving him an Opportunity to vindicate himself before he suffers any Thing in our Opinion upon

that Account. To this Purpose the wise Man (*Eccclus. xix. 13.*) very well inculcates, *Admonish a Friend; may be he hath not done it: And if he hath, that he doth it no more. Admonish a Friend; may be he has not said it; and if he have, that he sayeth not again: Admonish a Friend, for many Times it is a Slander; and believe not every Tale.*

Besides the Authority of so many reiterated Injunctions to put us always in Mind of these Endeavours for our Neighbour's Good; we shall do well to consider and affect our Minds with some Motives to encourage us to proceed in this kind of Piety and Kindness: As consider we,

1. That Religion ought to be the Care and Concern of all Christians; to promote the Credit and Influence of it, and advance the Honour of God, and the Interest of his Son Christ our Lord's Kingdom, in ourselves and others, as far as our Power can extend, should be the supreme Wish, and the ardent Endeavour of every good Man.

Without some Degree of this Zeal, we have in vain pretended to love God, or have a Concern in good earnest for his Glory: For whomsoever we heartily love, we make his Interest our own, are uneasy to see any Affront and Despite to him, but presently kindle into Resentment, and are excited to stand up in Defence of his Cause: Who can bear to see his earthly Benefactor abused? The least Spark of Gratitude refrains not itself from offering something in his Behalf; nor can we with any Patience sit by, and see our natural Father injured, and set at naught, without doing every Thing in our Power to rescue him from the Wrong, or Contempt offered unto him; or what good Subject, having a loyal Value and Regard to his earthly Sovereign, burns not with Indignation against any who rebel against his Government, trample his Authority, and undervalue his sacred Person? And shall

shall we be unconcerned Standers-by, to see, to hear so often, so much Wickedness done against the Lord our God; and not be jealous for him our supreme, our most gracious Sovereign, our infinitely good Father, Friend, and Benefactor? Can we be patient, be indifferent, or unmoved to observe such injurious Treatment of him? His Government openly rebelled against, his holy Name blasphemed, his heavenly Majesty abused, his paternal Goodness ungratefully insulted? Can we be daily Witness of so much Provocation, through the Iniquity of many Sons and Daughters of Disobedience, and be silent, or not grieved at it? or think it nothing to us? or use no Endeavours to put a Stop to it? For are we not (deny it who can) his professed Servants, his Subjects, his Children? *begotten by the Faith* of the Gospel, and adopted into the Promises of *blessed Immortality and Glory* with him? What will he think of our Coldness in an Affair that ought to be most at our Hearts, and ever remain uppermost there? The grand Business for which our very Being was given us, *i. e.* the Promotion of his Glory. What will the Observer of all Things judge of our Carriage, our shameful Slackness and Temerity in fearing to *displease Men more than the living God*? What can we say for our own Unconcernedness? For all righteous Men of old, whom we read of in the Records of our Salvation, and whose Faith and Conversation we are bid to follow, were filled with Zeal for the Honour of God, Love of Virtue, and grieved and vexed to the Soul, at the Abominations, filthy Irregularities, and stubborn Follies of ungodly Sinners: They endeavoured to dissuade from it, to shew the Friendship of reclaiming to their Happiness; they reproved by Words and Chastisements, by more powerful Conviction to the contrary, their own good Example

"I beseech you again, be as good Law-givers to one another; continue faithful Counsellors to each other," says *Barnaby* in his Chatholick Epistle: And wherein can we answer for ourselves, but that we are greatly fallen short both of the Precept and Example set us; very deficient in our Love to the Righteousness and Prosperity of his Kingdom, which ought to rule in our Hearts; strangely forgetful of our Relation to him, and his manifold Commands to endeavour the Salvation of our Brother, and not suffer Sin upon him, or see him go to the Devil without some Remonstrance for his Good? But we will confess, that this has been our Fault, and customary Omission, and beseech him to *forgive us his Servants* in this past Neglect, and we will be more active for our God, and mindful of our Brother's Welfare for the Future.

For consider we, *2dly*, The Charity we ought to exercise to our Brother, is another Obligation upon every Christian to discourage and oppose Prophaneness and Immorality, and put a Check to Sin and Wickedness, and diminish the Growth of it in ourselves and others, with all our Might. We are invited and constrained by the Love and Value we ought to have for our Neighbour's Soul, not to be unconcerned about the eternal Salvation of it. That is in Truth a dangerous Bar and Hindrance to our own eternal Happiness: Because it argues a palpable Want of that Charity, without which, whoever liveth is counted *dead before God*; which therefore we must be in Readiness upon all Occasions to manifest towards our Brother: So my Text seems to impute it. The whole Verse runs thus; *Thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy Neighbour; and not suffer Sin upon him.*—As if the omitting to do this last, was an Effect of hating our Brother; at least, a certain Sign and undeniable Consequence, that we do not love him as much as we ought.

But

But now, if *Charity*, as the Apostle assures us, is *the End of the Commandments*; this Endeavour of not suffering Sin to lie upon him, is the highest Instance of that Charity which we can possibly evidence in respect to our Brother, the most beneficial to him, and the most pleasing to God. Holiness and Piety, and the Fear of the Lord, is the greatest Kindness which our Brother can receive, or we can promote in him; and therefore among those Endeavours, which are very commendably used for our Brothers' Good, whether in their Bodies, Good-Names, or Fortunes, let us still be sure to have an Eye to their highest Good of all, their Encrease in good Living, and their Deliverance from their Sins: Let our greatest Care be to make them better, rather than richer, and more honourable than they were. For this is true Kindness and Love indeed, to shew ourselves most concerned for that whereby our Brother will be infinitely most advantaged; this should be the great Aim of all our Labours for his Advantage.

Besides, we can do him this great Kindness without diminishing any Thing of our Stock. All penurious Objections against Almsgiving are prevented; because the more Goodness and Wisdom we impart to others, the more we have. The great and glorious Business, the worthy Delight and constant Industry of our Saviour Christ upon Earth, was it not to redeem Souls from the Misery and Thralldom of Sin, and the amazing Destruction of avenging Hell? And whosoever, in Imitation of him, labours to *convert his Brother* to Holiness and Happiness, *from the Errors of his Ways*, and the Danger of his evil Courses, will, in some measure, be a Saviour unto him, and an infinite Gainer himself by this Manifestation of his Love.—*Greater Love and Kindness than this has no Man to shew*

for his Brother, except *laying down his Life*. If we grieve for a temporal Damage befallen our Neighbour or Acquaintance, how much rather ought we to redress the Accumulation of all Evil, the only Evil Thing, which subjects to the most infinite Loss, and produces, without a timely Interposition of Change of Life, the most unspeakable Damage, and Ruin of Body and Soul; and that is none other than what is too common to be seen in our Neighbours habitual Sin and Iniquity.

With respect to his Body; if we know of any Thing that will help him to Ease, or effect a Cure, we think ourselves obliged to offer our Assistance and Advice, or direct him where a Remedy may be had, and persuade him to make use of it, and be wise for his own Good: And are we only silent and hard-hearted, when we discern the mortal Distemper of Sin upon his Soul, which, if let alone, will plunge it into eternal Death, and the Pains of everlasting Torture? If we see him fallen into a Lethargy, we awaken him out of it, and scruple not to be sensibly free with him, in order to rouse him to Life and Sense, believing it a cruel Kindness to suffer him in that fatal Insensibility he would willingly die in, if let alone.— Should you see another offer to wound himself, you run in between Death and him, and fear not to displease him by wrenching the destroying Instrument out of his Hand.— We charitably enough take care of the Mad or Lunatick, prevent their mischieving themselves, using our Reason for the Recovery of theirs: Or, whoever should meet with a blind Man wandered to the Brink of a deep Pit, within a few Steps of Death, I am positive there are none here so void of Charity, but would be very ready to offer their Service to him, pull him back, tell him of the Danger he was insensible of, and put him in the
Way

Way again.--- And is Sin only to be suffered on our Brother as the least of Evils, unremedied, untold of? which is itself the greatest Disorder of Mind, gives the deepest Wound, and is the fatallest Lethargy? Why then not interpose? --- Does our Charity and Kindness only fail us at that Article of doing him Good, where it should be most of all employed? Is our Brother's whole Stake and Stress, that calls for our Care, circumscribed to his bodily Part; or is this Life his sole Good and Happiness, that we so preposterously mis-act our Charity as to forget the Man, while we mind and save this from Danger, whilst we behold himself quietly perish, without shewing Pity, or offering an Hand to his Rescue?

We are very careful of his Trifles, but have no Thoughts for his great Concern.---- We see our Neighbour's House on Fire, we alarm him of the Danger; we see Cattle commit Trespas in his Ground, we kindly inform him of it, and we do well. But think we still there is no Danger nor Detriment in Sin making such Havock in his inward Parts, which are very wicked, that we hold our Peace and keep Silence even from good Words, till his Inch of Candle is burnt out, and his Soul, which is the endearing Man, leaves the Body and all Things visible, and takes its Flight into the World of Spirits? How can we be so unmerciful to let him so long alone, not to put in the least Check, nor speak one kind Word of Advice to our Friend, when we so plainly see *Wickedness upon him*, Damnation before him, and *Destruction ready to swallow him up*? Is this our Friendship to a Christian Brother? We could do no more to a Turk. We are civiller to the Ox of our Neighbour, and help it out of the Ditch. Is this the Love of wise Men or Children? Let the Children among us answer,

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swer for the greater Good ; if the Men prefer the Least to the Greatest, when the Greater is more easy to be performed, more Noble and Godlike in itself ; also to be accomplished at a cheaper Rate.

Wherein does this differ from the Love of Heathens, Publicans, and Sinners ? They would do all these bodily Kindnesses ; yea, the Soldier in the Camp readily ventures his own Life for the Rescue of his Comrade from Slaughter and Captivity. And we, fighting against *spiritual Enemies*, see many a Soldier of Christ, on this Hand, and that Hand of us, *led Captive* by the Devil and his Host, and not attempt his Rescue. Could the Hopes of a Crown of Leaves animate a *Roman* to a Charity so full of Danger, and the eternal Crown, that is so *exceeding* ponderous of *Glory*, not be sufficient to encourage a Christian to a Kindness entirely safe, and no less beneficial to him than to his Brother ? What hard-hearted Christians must they be who have no Compassion nor Help ready at Hand for that Part of us wherein we only are Christians ?---- Base Self-love, the Cause of all Corruption in the World ! How can we love Christ who love not the Members, nor care for the Souls for whom Christ died ?

By this Time you see we must necessarily correct our Mistake, and alter our Practice, or else we can pretend to be but Half-lovers of our Brother, and the worser Half of him, his Carcass and his worldly Goods, whilst we overlook his Soul, which is allied most to us and to Christ, and suffer it to lie in Poverty, in the Misery of Sin, and the Confinement of Hell. For where should begin the chief Efforts of our charitable Offices ? To endeavour the Recovery and Happiness of that by all Means ; *This ought we to have done, and not leave any Charity to his*
Body

Body undone ; that it may open a Reception for our further Love and Admonition, to operate upon his Mind, and reform it to a wise Conversation and Godliness of living. To rescue any one Soul from the Habit and Folly of Sin, by our rightly adapted Reprehension, is a greater Gift and Charity than to bestow the greatest Honour and Estate on him : We may give also our worldly Goods to the Poor, and yet do it without Charity : Neither *save our own, or another Soul* thereby. But this *Charity* of turning a Sinner from the Power of Satan unto God, can have no Vanity or worldly Praise in it ; brings in a certain Glory unto God and Christ, Joy to the Angels of Heaven, and a vast Recompence of Reward to the pious Admonisher ; *covers a Multitude of Sins*, and makes it worth his while, that he was born into this World.

Reflect we also, *zally*, upon the great Need we all stand in of such Acts of Friendship and brotherly Admonition : How useful and necessary the Advice and Direction of a Friend is in civil Concerns, we readily acknowledge, are very thankful for, and think ourselves greatly obliged : But in our spiritual and most important Affair, we have yet far greater Occasion, and ought, least of all, to depend upon ourselves, but call in the Aid of others Counsel, to give a true Account and Report of our spiritual Condition.

Some are apt to judge too hardly of their Case, thinking themselves guilty of those Failings which exclude them from the Hopes of Heaven, and the Favour of God ; even tho' they have repented them truly of their former Sins, sincerely keep their *whole Conversation* according to the Rule of God's Word, *undefiled* from wilful and presumptuous Sin, and fail only in the uncondemning Frailties and Infirmities which are unavoidable to our human Nature. Others presume too much, and they are innumerable

able in Number, on the other Hand, in the Security of their Condition ; as if they are certainly in a State of Salvation, and the Way to eternal Blessedness, when they are in the Paths which directly lead from it.

In both these, the Advice and Opinion of another is to be taken, before our own : Because no Man is so fearful, nor yet so presuming in judging of another Person, as we naturally are of ourselves : We are careless and inaccurate in passing Censure and Blame upon our own Actions, apt to admit every Thing that can extenuate the Guilt of our own Misdoings, whilst the Stander-by, void of that Self-love which blinds and perverts the Judgment which we make of ourselves, can observe more nicely, and pass a more exact impartial Sentence concerning us. For this Reason are we bid by *St. James to confess our Faults one to another* ; without which our Brother can make a very uncertain Judgment of our Actions, because the Intention of the Doer, which is a leading and determining Circumstance, must otherwise be a Secret : He cannot know that we are ready to give and receive this fraternal Correction in Meekness and Good-will, as Occasion shall require.

We stand too near to view ourselves distinctly in a right Point of Light. I appeal to Experience, do not we every Day see That in another which we overlook and forget in ourselves ? Scarce any Body sees his own irregular Self-love, Covetousness, Pride, Vain-glory, Evil-speaking, Intemperance, or Passion : And if we have not some ill-natured Enemies, who observe with malicious Discernment, or some faithful Friend and spiritual Adviser to tell us of our Defects, if we do not hear of them either out of Enmity or Kindness, abundance of them must pass unobserved, and unamended by us : But wise and happy is the Man who makes holy and re-

reforming Use of such Memorandums ; and of all Men most untractable is he who is as impatient to hear the kind Animadversions of his Friends that love him, as of other Men that hate him : There are very few so good as not to stand in need of Admonition one Time or another ; and fewer yet, who have the Ingenuity and good Sense to take it in good Part, and improve by it as it was designed : It is a certain Proof of a Disposition to Goodness, and great Eminence in Virtue, to be thankful for such Hints, and make our Advantage of them ; and love our Reprover the better, when we are blessed with a faithful and *prudent* one.

The holy Psalmist, as good as he was, yet invites all such Reprehension of his Carriage ; *Let the Righteous, says he, rather smite me, it will be Kindness ; let him reprove me, it will be an excellent Oil, that will not break my Head.* Ps. cxli. How heartily does he bless *Abigail*, 1 Sam. xxv. 32. for preventing the Commission of Sin, and disarming his Rage and fierce Purposes against the churlish *Nabal*, which, if once committed, though in so seeming just Resentment, would have cost him Sorrow and Repentance ever after. *As fine Gold*, (so says his Son *Solomon*, Prov. xxv. 12.) *is a wise Reproof upon an obedient Ear* ; it obliges an understanding Man as much, and makes a well-disposed Mind as sensible of the precious Kindness, as if you bestowed the richest Jewel upon him.

If Friendship is one of the greatest Blessings of human Life, the most noble and useful Office of that is to exert itself in these affectionate Reproofs : It demonstrates a sincere Love and Fidelity, and what is the comely Freedom, and the properest Use of a Friend, and clearly shews how true and disinterested our Love and Aims are, that we seek not our own Profit so much as his, when we venture to do that which will advantage our Friend
and

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and Brother, rather than those Things which flatter and please him. In what Cases, and how far we are obliged, in conformity to this Duty of rebuking him, to venture upon displeasing him, will be shewn in its proper Place hereafter. Mean time, in the

Fourth Place, let us strengthen and encourage ourselves in Resolutions to perform it, by recollecting another Motive and good Consequence of our doing it: And that is, we shall not only bring Honour to God, and the Christian Religion by the good Effects of our holy Zeal, but we shall contribute to promote the Prosperity of our Country and Nation; for as *Righteousness exalteth a Nation*, and entitles to the divine Favour and Blessing, so by Consequence, *Sin is the Reproach of any People*; and not only a Reproach, but the Occasion of all the publick Evils, Judgments, and Calamities that befall it: By amending, therefore, our Lives in the first Place, and effecting the Reformation of all those we have any Influence upon, we lessen the Provocation, and take off from the Wrath of God, and get more into his Favour and Protection, by wisely adding to the Number of the few Righteous, for whose Sake the Lord is mercifully pleased to spare the Wicked, and forbear their temporal Destruction, that such *Goodness may lead them to Repentance*: It adds likewise to the Encrease of Peace and Quietness, just Dealing, courteous and obliging Manners, and all Sorts of beneficent Deeds, and happy Living.

I remember in our *English History*, in *William the Conqueror's Time**, it is related, that every Tithing, i. e. every ten Families in the Division of the Hundred, were obliged by Law to produce

* Sir *William Temple's* Introduction to Hist. of Eng. 2d Edit. Page 162.

every Criminal to Justice, his Person or Estate ; or make Amends and Reparation for the Injuries of such an one in their Division and Care ; and if not able, then it fell upon the Hundred. By this Means, it became every Man's Interest, as well as his Duty, to prevent all Crimes and Misdemeanors among their Neighbours. Every Tithing was bound for the Behaviour of every Freeman among them. No better human Law perhaps was ever invented, to preserve the Safety of any State, and of equal Utility to Prince and People ; making Honesty, and Innocence of Life, so necessary, by the easy Apprehension or Discovery, and certain Punishment of Offenders.

The charging every one with his Brother's good Behaviour made it his indispensable Care to look to it, as one that had an Interest therein, to reclaim him from Transgression, and preserve him a good Man. In like manner are we bound by the Laws of the spiritual and eternal Kingdom, to which we avow our Subjection, to *reprove* and rebuke our Fellow Servants and Subjects *in any wise, and not suffer Sin*, and Disobedience upon them, which is so extremely displeasing to our King and Master. But if we regard neither the Welfare of our Brother's Soul, neither his nor our Country's Good, we ought, however, I hope, in the

Fifth Place, to be excited to this good Work in Consideration of our own Advantage. For, if we will believe him who requires it of us, he has promised, and he is able to make it fully good, that it shall be greatly advanced, and our holy Labours and Endeavours rewarded with the Addition of multiplied Felicity.—They that *turn many to Righteousness, shall shine as the Stars for ever* : For which Reason, how wise, and well employ'd is he that winneth Souls ? And, to name no more, remem-

ber

ber and give Credit to what St. James says, (Ch. v. Ver. 19, 20.) *Brethren, if any of you do err from the Faith, and one convert him, let him know, that he who converteth a Sinner from the Error of his Ways, shall save a Soul from Death, and shall bide a Multitude of Sins.* How worthy and endeared to us is the Undertaking to save a Soul from Death: Seeing it is of more Worth than all the Labour, and Possessions of this fleeting World? a Divine Endeavour, the most generous Part of our *Labour of Love*; a noble Prize, and a vast Glory.

But what will be the Enjoyment of his heavenly Glory in the full Plenitude that re-edified Nature is capable of possessing! Let us, by such Love and Charity to Souls, wisely prepare for it, that we may be worthy to possess that Exquisiteness of Enjoyment, that surpasses all human Description. *He is faithful that hath promised*, if we are but true Lovers of our Brother: Let us therefore, for our own Sake, be diligent in endeavouring to do him an everlasting Benefit, since it is so beneficial at the same Time to ourselves: For if it succeeds, God will greatly recompence, and never forget our *Labour of Love*: And our Brother will likewise bless us, and praise God upon our Account for evermore. *If he slight your Offer, and would none of your Reproof, you are then free from your Brother's Blood*; and the Piety of your seasonable Attempt will be recorded to your immortal Praise.

To use our best Endeavours for rescuing Prey out of the Destroyer's Teeth, and add one more besides ourself to the Number of the Blessed above, is of itself a great and glorious Atchievement, applauded and commanded of God, and admired and assisted by Angels.

Lastly, and in the *Sixth* Place, let the Danger of omitting this necessary and excellent Duty; deter us from desisting, excite us to banish our Sloth, quicken

quicken our Backwardness, and effectually enspire us with Alacrity, not to forego one good Opportunity of performing this greatest Good that we can well perform in this World.

For it is truly perilous to defer or forbear, when God so peremptorily commands: Where is his Honour, or where our Duty? If we think of dispensing with ourselves in the Omission of it, we unthinkingly plunge, involve ourselves into some guilty Participation of those Crimes of our Neighbours, which it was in our Power to have prevented by the Application of our friendly Admonition. *Qui non vetat peccari, cum fieri posset, jubet*; "he that forbids and restrains not Sin, when it is in his Power, commands it;" and whosoever commands it, does it: Not to disprove and shew some Token of Blame to irregular Doings, is to consent to them, and in some Sort to entice unto Sin; not to discourage and discountenance what we can, is a secret Encouragement, and a kind of Delighting in it; and we are instructed by the Apostle to the Romans, that they who *take Pleasure in other Men's Vices* (as all they seem to do who conceive no Displeasure at them) are many Degrees worse than they who commit them.

Do we rightly consider what our Negligence in this Matter comes to? Have we not Sins enough of our own to answer for? (Who can say to the contrary?) that we are so lavish and improvident to heap up the Guilt of others upon ourselves? When you read the Words of our present Text, mind also the Margin of the Bible, and you will find this very Reason, we are speaking of, to excite all due Carefulness in us to rebuke our Neighbour by any Means, and a very concerning Caution it is: For that renders it, *That thou bear not Sin for him*. As if by not reprovng one's Neighbour, we brought the Guilt of his Sin upon

our own Head : And so many of the *Jews* understood it (as Commentators inform us) and have framed a current Syng, and an excellent Remark, thereupon, viz. " That *Jerusalem* had not been " destroyed, but because one Neighbour did not " reprove another." And perhaps one Reason why the Righteous are involved in the same Calamity with the Wicked, is, because they do not their Part in reprovng them as they ought.

That every Parent partakes in the Misdemeanor and Transgression of their Children, by not correcting and restraining them ; by not instructing and dissuading them earnestly to the contrary, is without all Question ; neither will it admit of any Doubt, but that the Sins of Servants also lie at their Masters or Mistresses Door, if they have been negligent in giving them wholesome Advice for their Faults against God, which are the Cause of all their Misbehaviour towards them : For in both these there is an undeniable Superiority to recommend good Counsel, with such a prevailing Sway as has all Probability of succeeding, and authorizing it to be listened to, to make an Impression for Good almost whether they will or not : And not to use Authority to this excellent End, is to misuse one's Talent, and abuse the noblest Opportunity of doing the highest Kindness in the World, for which God will call us to Account, requiring the lost Life of our Brother at our Hands, in Proportion as we have Influence and Authority.

But then the Enquiry is, how far we are by this Duty obliged to make use of our Interest in Friends and Acquaintance, to tell them of their Failings ; what must be done to preserve a good Conscience, and acquit ourselves as God expects, when Sin is committed in our Company ; how must

must we occasionally rebuke Superiors, Equals, or Inferiors; and in what Manner is it to be done? Here is the whole Difficulty, which must remain to be discussed at another Opportunity. However, I should have been loth to have raised our Obligations to the Practice of it so high, if I did not hope to shew you the Reasonableness of it also.





S E R M O N

The Eighteenth.

*The successful Manner of addressing
friendly Advice. The Disposition it
is to be received on.*

A second Discourse on L E V. xix. 17.

———*Thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy Neighbour,
and not suffer Sin upon him.*

IN my former Discourse I laid before you the Obligations which this, and many other Scriptures, lay upon us to the Practice of brotherly Admonition ; how frequently and peremptorily commanded of God, how manifestly our Duty : How it is the greatest Kindness we can intend to our Neighbour, to ourselves, or to our Country ; and the supreme Instance of Charity which God requires, or we can perform. I reminded you also, of several other weighty Considerations, which ought by all Means to retrieve the Practice of a Duty most expedient for us Sinners, who are blind to, or forgetful of our own erring and straying, and stand in continual Need of all the appointed Counsel and Admonitions to keep us in, and recover us to the Paths of virtuous and godly Living, which becomes the Gospel of Christ. And must I here
call

call to Mind that it is fallen into general Difuse? Who can difsemble, or abftain almoft to lament it? Is it impracticable? or is it of little or no Benefit when done? Who will venture to fay either, when the all-wife God is the Commander of it; fo very preffingly, fo very frequently too? Surely he is not that hard Mafter, to require any Thing beyond our Ability, or befides our Advantage. Yet, that it is difficult to be perform'd, is as true, as that it is a Difficulty which ought not to be the leaft Excufe for our Negligence and Non-performance: Because none other is the Author of the Difficulty but ourfelves; it lies at our Door altogether. It is we who lay the Bar in the Way, we contrive, we foment that very Hindrance, which we ought to confpire, all confpire unanimoſly to remove; that fo we may mutually give and receive the excellent Benefit, and fo diſcharge our Conſciences of the Duty, as we ought, before God.

The Truth, and that which is the true Grievance of the Caſe, is, that moſt of us are defective in the charitable Concern we ought to be poſſeſſed with for our Neighbour's eternal Salvation; or if we are ſincerely well affected to it, we either want the laudable Courage to promote it, by applying wholeſome and ſeaſonable Admonitions; or the Caution and Diſcretion, which, by the Principles of human Nature, ordinarily are needful to make it effectual: And there is a further Diſcouragement, on the other Hand, that very few are ſo ſenſible of their ſpiritual Inter-eſt, as to be rightly diſpos'd to receive good Advice; but, inſtead thereof, are captious, and grow angry at the Overture of ſuch Kindneſs from a Friend: This, again, leſſens the Numbers, and not a little diſheartens the Endeavours of faithful Adviſers. Between both, the Duty itſelf is become ſo nice and tickliſh, ungrateful and hazardous, that few care to meddle with it. What through the De-

licacy of the one, and the Imprudence of the other, it seems to be left undone by common Consent. And I would, with all my Heart, consent to it too, and hold my Peace, provided God did not so expressly exact the contrary from us, and no Harm accrued to ourselves, neither any Loss to our Neighbour from Neglect. But pray let us not deceive ourselves: For who of us can be innocent in lightly regarding a Duty on which our God has laid such Weight? or where lies the Safety of thinking to shelter ourselves in Excuses that are in themselves insufficient, and are feigned by our own selves, and are indeed of evil Custom, in order to dispense with our Obedience, and be exempted from the highest Service we possibly can do our Neighbour?

Tho' I am in a privileged Place, exempt from the Obstruction of your occurring Objections; yet I shall freely concede to, and learn from all that can be made, that I may by Responses contribute the more to see this Duty prosper among you, and triumph over all Objection. I own, therefore, it is true, and certain, that it is not to be attempted unadvisedly, to all Persons, at all Seasons, or for all Failures; nor in Language unmeet, or in Manner indiscreet: But with due Observation of all the Regulations, and prudential Circumstances, which are likely to gain the most probable Success. Because the Consequence of not attending to such previous Requisites may prove the doing more Harm than Good, by our Officiousness, serving to confirm an Offender both in his Sin, and his Displeasure against you, instead of reclaiming him to Duty, and thereby making him your Friend. But then this Fear of Miscarriage should only admonish us to set about it more warily, and circumspectly, but does not release from the pious Endeavour: For he who has commanded the Duty, undoubtedly commands, at the same Time, the most suitable and effectual Man-
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ner of performing it ; and has given us the Use of Reason to consult and decide that, besides some general Directions he has been pleas'd to lay down for regarding this Affair. By this he warns to the Practice ; by this all Objections are taken away, that so we may *in any wise rebuke our Neighbour, and not suffer Sin upon him.* This is what I am now entering upon ; and, for the better facilitating so advantageous a Duty, I will,

I. In the first Place, recommend those Qualifications which are indispensably requisite in those who would fulfil the Commandment of *Rebuking his Neighbour, and not suffering Sin upon him.*

II. What Dispositions are required in those who receive Admonition and Rebuke from another.

I. Let us attend to the Qualifications of him that reproves. And, in the first Place, I think it adviseable that every private Person should well consider and distinguish two Things, concerning, *First*, The Person he has the Charity to admonish : And likewise, *Secondly*, The Fault he is about to reprove for. He is first to distinguish and make a Difference of the Person of his Neighbour : For he is not obliged to rebuke every individual Person he sees do amiss. There are several Limitations in Scripture, and in Reason, that discharge him from it. In many Places of the former we are forbid to *reprove a Scornor, lest he bate us, and we get only Shame*, and a Blot, for our Pains. We are commanded to *go from the Presence of a foolish Man, when we perceive not in him the Lips of Knowledge ; Not to offer that which is holy unto Dogs, nor cast the Pearls of godly Admonition before Swine, lest they trample them under their Feet, and turn again, and rend their Reprover, with some Mischief, Despite,*

and scornful Usage, or other. Good Counsel, or any, however so well intended, Remonstrance of the final Event of their evil Courses, is all a Jest to the first Sort ; and to offer Advice to a brutish Nature, drowned in Sin and Sensuality, and who knows no other Delight, is to little better Purpose than setting the Excellency, and the Pleasures of Virtue, and the Glories of Heaven, and the Arguments that recommend them, before an *Ox that eateth Hay*. Such hardened Sinners are past all the ordinary Methods of being reclaimed by Repentance, and their Case is entirely desperate, if God is not extraordinary merciful in awakening them by some of his sharpest correcting Judgments.

But towards others, less hardened, and in whom appear some Tokens and Dispositions to Virtue ; and consequently some Probability on our Side of effecting Good ; we should not be so timorous of a Repulse, or of bad Success ; but sow the Seed of wholesome Reprehension, and commit it to the Blessing of God, who is able mightily to prosper our weak Endeavours, which spring from his Command. *Of some have Compassion, (says St. Jude) making a Difference, and plucking them out of the Fire.* Do thus where there is any Probability of our effecting Good, because the whole Obligation of this Duty depends upon the rational Hopes and Prospect of succeeding in the Performance : And it cannot be understood to oblige private Christians any farther, whether Men will hear, or whether they will forbear. We who are the publick Reprovers, are obliged to go on in our Way ; but all People in common are not under the same Obligation : It is to these I have all along confin'd my Proposals from this Subject, in Contradistinction to Magistrates, and Ministers, who have another Sort of special Authority to rebuke and correct Vice.

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Now the Probability of Success, which is to adjust and measure out the good Offices of private Persons in this Affair, ought certainly to be gathered, and judiciously weighed, as I conceive, from the Degrees of Acquaintance they have with Persons, and their Authority and Influence over them; their Relation to, or their particular Friendship and Familiarity with them; in the Knowledge of their Temper, or any other Interest in them by means of their having a good Opinion of us; all which can never be so well employed, as in our best, and affectionate Efforts, and gentle Animadversions, for the bettering our Neighbour, and removing Sin from him. Every Body has some Acquaintance, some particular Friend, or other, to exercise this his Good-will and Prudence upon. Without some Degree of Acquaintance with the Faulty, I think it ought seldom or never to be attempted, because there is wanting the Opinion of the Censurer's Good-will and Kindness, which is the necessary Foundation of all successful Advising. Besides, without such previous Acquaintance, the Person will be thought no better than a Busy-body, an Intruder into other People's Business, a Spy upon their Actions, of a pragmatistical Temper; which will sooner excite an Indignation, than any Attention to his Reprimands. It is a very impertinent Officiousness to meddle where other Persons have greater Influence to effect a Reformation; and if they neglect it, our better Way is, to admonish them of performing their Duty to their Friend. The better we are acquainted, the longer the Familiarity, and stricter the Friendship we happen to have with a Person or Persons; proportionably greater is our Likelihood of seeing our Endeavours prosper: And it is such a fair Invitation to assay our Skill, and not baulk the comely Endeavour of Kindness, (that noble and glorious Endeavour of saving a Soul) that pretermittting it wholly,

wholly, must needs be an Omission as full of Danger to ourselves, as of Treachery to our Brother.

Again, the Authority we are providentially placed in above others, gives such an Influence, and uncontrollable Ground of Right, and of Opportunity of forwarding the spiritual Good of Children, Servants, and many other Dependants and Inferiors, that the Neglect of trying it is an inexcusable sharing in their Sins. And what Access have Relations to amend and remind one another of Failings? what Concern should they not have, lest Sin, the Author of all Misery, remain on their own Blood? This Obligation, we see, unquestionably holds good towards Equals and Inferiors, whom we are acquainted with, and believe also to be of a tractable and corrigible Temper; without which there can be no Thoughts of our Advice meeting with good Reception, but that it must be fruitless, and therefore better let alone. But then towards Superiors of our Acquaintance, it must be careful to proceed with greater Awe and Respect: A Failure in Deference, and Regard, would spoil all our Charity, and provoke them against us. The wise Man says, *There is a Reproof that is not comely; there is a Man that boldeth his Tongue, and is wise. Is it fit (says Elibu) to say to the King, Thou art wicked, and to Princes, Ye are ungodly?* And it proportionably holds good to all other Superiors.

When it is needful to direct any Reprehension towards such, it is better done in the softest Artifice of blaming the same Thing in some third Person, or in the successful Way of Allusion or Parable: And this is a most skilful Method, and Scheme of Speech, which the Spirit of God makes frequent Use of to bring Men to the Acknowledgment of the Truth, and of their Offences against it; by shewing People their own very selves in another's Image, their Deviations and Deservings in another's

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Miscarriage and Punishment. Our Saviour's repeated Use of so many Parables serves to recommend this soft and gentle Method of treating with guilty Sinners, tho' he sometimes had Recourse to greater Severity, as the Case required.

There is something in human Nature that recoils, and is disgusted at the Bluntness of a Reproof; and the same Man who sets himself upon his Guard, and a Posture of Defence against those who come downright upon them, would have yielded to softer Approaches, and more insinuating Ways. Thus *Nathan* applied to *David*, and convinced him so prevalently, and yet so inoffensively, as to foreclose all his Displeasure. The very Tongue of *Nathan*, without touching him any otherwise, threw down the mighty Conqueror of *Goliath* with his own Consent; and never any Man lay more prostrate in Humiliation for his Sins than did the reprov'd *David*. His divinely commissioned, yet artful Reprover, turns the Disposition, which we are all so famous for, of censuring the Conduct of others, forgetting our own Guiltiness of the like, and passing Sentence on their Actions, upon himself; and when he had condemned himself out of his own Mouth, (as we do ourselves in the Reflections we pass on other People) he confessed his Fault, and said *he had sinned*. So should we consider rather to judge ourselves, than others, when we are guilty of the same, or as bad Failings; we should rather, in Imitation of this Way, wholly turn the Current of telling ill Stories, and communicating reflecting Slander to the Party's own Face, when it may do Good, and not behind his Back, when it can do nothing but Mischief, as it is generally and maliciously practised, that he may have an Opportunity either to vindicate his Innocence, or condemn himself into Amendment.

Some

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Some again, at the Expence of their Sincerity, have succeeded in their intended Blame of great Persons, by commending them lavishly for what they were defective in ; which served to shame them into a Resolution of deserving it in good earnest : But the more innocent Way of sincere and comely Entreaty, may work upon the Greatest : None think themselves above receiving a Petition ; and it is the Privilege of the lowest Friend, to present one.

And as we distinguish of our Neighbour, so ought we, 2dly, of the Things which properly call for our Rebuke. We are not to spend our Remarks and Reprehension upon little Errors, but dangerous Crimes and Omissions ; because in common Frailties we are pretty equal and alike. The Text gives in Charge only not to suffer *Sin* upon him : Wilful Iniquity and presumptuous Immorality, is the Danger and Inlet of Misery to our Brother in all his Capacities ; this is worthy to stir up compassionate Dissuasions, and engage all our Interest in him to reclaim him from it ; such as Drunkenness, Swearing, Gaming, customary Lying, loose and sensual Conversation, prophaning the Lord's-Day, absenting from the Sacrament, or other Parts of Publick Worship, or any other grievous Crime ; and we ought to proportion our Reprehension to the Heinousness of the Fault.

There is one general Vice, which is very heinous, and exceeding contrary to the Rules of our Christianity, and nothing wants a Reformation more ; which is Detraction and Back-biting. We can do nothing better than to reprehend and correct one another for it ; and that in both the Branches of this Sin, which are an Inclination to spread and propagate ill Reports, and also a too great Credulity in believing what we hear of this Nature, without sufficient Grounds. 'Tis this Credulity in the Hear-

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ers that does all the Mischief to our Neighbour's Reputation ; for without that the Divulger's Malice would be disappointed, and have no bad Effect, unless on his single self : We should rather rise up in Defence of the injured Absent, if known to us ; if not known, demand of the Speaker whether he is sure what he says is true ; or try to divert the Discourse, and let him perceive a Coldness and Dislike in us, which may cast a Check upon his calumnious Speaking.

As I said before, we should let no Evil of this Kind proceed out of our Mouth, but to the Use of edifying our Neighbour, and that is mostly to be done, in a friendly Manner, before his Face. And when we are disposed to do him a Kindness of this sort, we should further be sure of another Thing, *i. e.* whether the Person is really guilty of what we are about to reprove : We must be well informed of it, and not take up with flying uncertain Reports ; for the Pleasure of Evil-speaking in this evil Generation is strangely in search of Falshood and injurious Aspersions of one another's Good-Name ; and, if there is not a great Probability of the Thing's being true, we only betray our own credulous Rashness, and Uncharitableness, and seek Occasion of quarrelling, and venting our Spleen and Reproach to his Teeth. Such sort of Reproof will be interpreted to carry a Design with it, not so much to condemn them, as to make them believe that we ourselves are not guilty of the like ; unless our Charity is so qualified, as barely to acquaint him what is reported of him, though we believe it not ourselves ; and then it will be taken kindly at our Hands, and we preserve both our Friend and our Charity : For the Reprehension of a Friend should always be strictly just. To this Purpose the Son of *Sirach*, (*Eclus. xi. 7.*) *Blame*
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not before you have examined the Truth ; understand first, and then rebuke.

Neither should we ever reprimand a Person for a Fault he has long ago repented of ; for this is a cruel barbarous Insult, and a pure Reproach, since all Pretence of blaming is superseded by present Amendment, which should ever be the sole End and Reason of any Rebuke. We Sinners should be very tender in judging, lest ourselves are in as bad a Condition. "What if others sin by Surprise, you by Design ? They in one Act, you in an Habit ? They in one kind, you in five times more ? They sinned, and are penitent, you sin and are obdurate ? They return, you persevere ? They are ashamed, you glory ? O God ! if thou wast not more merciful in forgiving and forgetting than Men of like Passions are to one another, wretched and unpardonable would be the Case of Sinners !"

A 3^d Qualificatoin therefore perfectly necessary in a friendly Reprover, is not to be at the same Time guilty of those Misdemeanors which he intends to admonish his Brother for. Because he may very well expect the Back-stroke of that smiting Proverb, *Physician heal thy self*. He that cannot cure his own Ailment with his Medicine, cannot expect to be credited that it will cure the same in another ; and he that would cleanse a Blot with blotted Fingers, instead of mending, is likely to make it fouler. The only Way to give any Grace, or Appearance of Efficacy to our Dissuasives, is to be an Example ourselves of what we recommend : This will gain Access to the Heart of Man, and draw him into Compliance, beyond all the Powers of Persuasion ; for this takes off every Excuse and Objection that can be raised. Put the Case you see the same Fault in yourself, your Child, and your Acquaintance, you must ever begin Amendment in

in yourself, and then there will be no Consciouſness to intimidate good Admonition towards others, or cause it to recoil. Besides, it looks like a Jest, to be watchful over other Peoples Faults, and sleep to one's own.

Not as if it was absolutely required, that every one, who undertakes the Office of a friendly Monitor, must be perfectly free from all manner of Fault; for who then would be found capable? since *in many Things we offend all*. But there are many Degrees in the Guilt of Transgression: And though it would be very preposterous for the Man that has a *Beam* in his own Eye, to address himself to pull out a *Mote* in his Brother's; yet it hinders not in the least, but that he who has only a *Mote* himself, may very clearly discern the Beam in another's Eye, and be very well qualified to endeavour its Removal; so neither does every Infirmary or lesser Failing disqualify from the incumbent Duty of reprehending enormous Faults and grosser Iniquity in one's Neighbour. Sad would be the Case, indeed, if we were all alike bad, and in the same Condemnation, so as not to have the Face to venture at reprovng one another: But thank God it is otherwise; there are enough sufficiently qualified in Goodness above their Brethren for this good Work, if they would but be as mindful to perform it, as Opportunity offers. For,

4thly, It is to be observed, that all Times, Seasons, or Places, are not equally proper for it. For Instance, it is very unsuitable to begin a serious Admonition when the Party it is directed to is discomposed by any sort of Passion: Suppose it Mirth, he is unfit for such grave Impressions; suppose it Anger, he is much more incapable, and we may as well argue the Matter with a Storm as with such a one. When God himself reproved *Jonab*, when he was in an angry Mood, on purpose to convince him

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him of the Folly of the Prophet, * says God, *Doeſt thou do well to be angry?* *Jonah* ſnapping him ſhort, preſently retorts to his Maker, *I do well to be angry even to Death.* Or if our Brother is overwhelmed with any preſſing Sorrow, or Calamity, it is not the Time to upbraid him with more Faults during the Operation of that Paſſion: It will only ſerve to gall and feſter the wounded Mind the more, and excite in it an Aversion to the Chider, as an unſeaſonable Tormentor.

But if we would not loſe the Hopes of our Pains, and the Fruit of our Labour of Love, it is to be attempted only when the Offender is in a calm, ſedate, ſerious Temper, and a good Humour alſo. Then it is moſt probable our Advice will operate: The critical Juncture for correcting is to be watched, the Genius and Complexion of our Neighbour obſerved, for the better adapting our Medicine to his Conſtitution, and conveying the bitter Potion in the moſt agreeable Vehicle. The beſt Seaſon of his Temper ſhould be nicely heeded, that we may ſtrike in with it, and gain all the Advantage we can to our unwelcome Inſtruction. This is one of the Diſcretions of Friendſhip, to faſhion and accommodate one's ſelf to a Friend, and *become all Things* to him, that we may *gain him* to be what it is unſafe for him not to be; ſometimes to ſeem to give in to his Paſſion, that we may the better allay it; to yield to him in every little Thing, that he may be the more fully diſpoſed to yield to our Reaſons for minding thoſe of great Importance, and mending conſiderable Defects; to ſtudy to pleaſe him in all innocent Things, and win upon his Eſteem and Affections, that we may profit him the more in his great Felicity.

* *Jonah* iv. 9.

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We must not forget ourselves also, that this is to be transacted in private, and not before Company; for that only publishes his Disgrace, which is very grievous upon the Reflection, and more apt to exasperate and harden him in his Fault. *Plutarch* delivers it as his Opinion, that the Provocation which enraged *Alexander the Great*, and transported him to the killing his old Friend *Clytus*, was not so much any Offence he took at what he said, as the Rudeness of saying what he did before Company. None can believe that you have any Tenderness for his Soul, when you have none for his Reputation; but that out of some Pique or other, or Ostentation of Goodness, or Desire of gratifying yourself, by diminishing him, you chuse and delight to expose him publickly.

For the first Reproof, our Saviour positively directs to tell *thy Brother of his Offence between him and thee alone*, Matth. xviii. 15. *If he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy Brother.* For any Offence committed against thee, 'tis far better to reprove than to be angry secretly, says the Author of *Ecclus.* xx. 1, 2. But then as to the Miscarriages or Immorality we may chance to observe in others, especially Strangers, when we are in lawful and ingenuous Company, we are bound to shew no Manner of Favour, Approbation, or Allowance of it; entering our Protest against the same by a forbidding Look, and a Silence shewing Displeasure and Uneasiness; or by quitting the Room, if our Reprehension is like to have no Effect. There is no other Way of not having *Fellowship with the unfruitful Works of Darknes*; if we do not this Way reprove them, we are *Partakers* in the Guilt. We may be assured of this, that all the Events of evil Company are not Sins of Infirmary; bad Company are like Traitors, with whom if we act or conceal, we are guilty.

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5thly, There is another very material Discretion to be attended to by the Admonisher, which regards the Manner of administering Reproof; and without a due Heed thereto, all will be abortive, and our good Endeavours certainly lost; to prevent which, we shall do well to observe these following Regulations:

1. Never to reprove in Anger; for then our Chiding will be thought to be occasioned, not because our Brother is faulty, but because we are in a Passion; and such a Commotion will prejudice him against any Overtures for his Good. What saith the Scripture? *The Wrath of Man worketh not the Righteousness of God.*

2. Not in a ludicrous insulting Way; for if it is expected that we put on some real serious Concern for the temporal Misfortunes of our Neighbour, much more ought we to be so affected for any Thing amiss in his spiritual. The Temper of Derision is very unsuitable; tho' a Man may well enough be rallied out of little Indiscretions, he is hardly ever reclaimed that Way from any downright Sins and Iniquities; for the true Christian Charity *rejoiceth not in Iniquity.*

3. Therefore all reviling Expressions, and vaunting Reflections are to be banished out of our Style and Address; the bare Mention in the best Language and Manner is of itself severe enough; neither should it be too often, lest you disgust as a Teazer, but, at a proper Time, come in as it were by the bye, in an easy Freedom and unaffected Manner. When the Pill is gilded over, it makes some Abatements in the Fancy of its Unpleasantness, yet loses nothing of its purging Virtue.

4. It should farther appear to the Reproved that we have no private Interest or Passion to gratify by this Undertaking, but all is purely and absolutely directed to his own Benefit. We must convince him,

him, whatever we do, of the sincere Desire we have of his Welfare ; that finding Fault is a very ungrateful Task, and nothing could possibly have induced us to it but the most disinterested unfeigned Love to his Person, and hearty Concern for his Happiness ; which he will perceive from our tempering and proposing Matters with all the affectionate Gentleness we can think of ; and practise, as the Apostle directs the restoring a Brother should ever be, viz. *in the Spirit of Meekness, considering ourselves, lest we also be tempted.* Such is the tender Sympathy even of the apostolical Stile, 1 Cor. iv. 4. *I write not these Things to shame you, but, as my beloved Sons, I warn you.* And with what Address of Meekness and respectful Truth did he reprove King Agrippa ? The Apostles generally in their Epistles use the most conciliating Appellatives : So should we imitate them in our designed Exhortation of our Neighbour ; first disarm him of all After-Resentment, by a previous Conviction of our unfeigned Value for him : If we omit to deal with him in this balsamick Way, we rather irritate than heal the Wound ; we shall rather give him Tokens of our Malignity, than Good-will, or a conscientious Desire of bettering him. As without true Love to our Brother, the Alms we bestow on his Needs will do ourselves no Service ; so neither will our Counsel do him any, when it is void of that : But what proceedeth from unquestionable Love is the more irresistible, making its Way to his Heart ; and when his Affections are once gained, his Will soon surrenders to what you propound for his Good. Such obliging Methods willingly captivate him to return to his Duty, and his true Interest.

We must for this End also soften our Admonition, so as not to let it seem to proceed from an affected Superiority of Understanding, which serves to upbraid him with want of Knowledge ; as if it

intended only to shew him *our* Wisdom, and *his* Weakness; not as if we took upon us to dictate to him, or to expect he should obey us, but invite our Brother to more cautious Living with ourselves, condole with him, in the tenderest sympathising Reprimand, of the Necessity of greater Circumspection to our Ways, as becometh Christians, reminding him of the fearful Consequences of doing otherwise; that we ourselves perhaps were once seduced into the same evil Courses by Forgetfulness, or the Violence of the Temptation, but now by the Mercy of God have seen our Folly; and if he would make the same Pause we did, and weigh the Consequences of Things as we did, he will certainly be of our Mind: However, when he comes to die, he will infallibly, if he has the Use of Reflection, wish that he had done so, and taken our Advice. Let us then instil, not in an imperious chiding Air, but by Way of Memorandum of human Frailty; as that we are all too apt to forget ourselves upon such Occasions; to yield too far to Temptations, and mischuse and prefer a temporal before an eternal Good; that it was thro' Inadvertency or Surprise, belike, that he did so at such a Time, thro' Passion or Mistake, and he was not well aware, or else he would never have done such a Wrong: That he was misinformed, or would never have said such a Thing; that he acts wisely enough in such and such Things: And here we innocently and very seasonably may bestow Commendations upon what is really deserving in him, that we may the better introduce our softest Expostulation, why he does not act the wise Man in all Things, in Things of such an infinite Consequence especially; that we cannot but secretly wonder he should differ so much from himself in the Conduct of his Actions.

These and such like gracious Insinuations, ingratiating every Accent, cannot well fail of hav-
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ing some good Effect ; especially if he is a Person not too much hardened in Wickedness, and of such a tolerable good Understanding, as not to be displeased with our most friendly beneficent Freedom : We should in such a Case improve upon the first Impression before we desert him, when we are so far blessed with Success as to perceive fair Hopes of his recovering to a sound Mind, and the Paths of Virtue, which lead to his eternal Happiness. And what an invaluable Kindness are we thus consulting and discharging to our Brother, worthy of all our Pains, and our best Study how to accomplish ! Indeed it is only such as these that we are to treat in this tender Manner, and nice Procedure ; and for our Encouragement therein, the Scripture has foretold us the happy Issue, and in a Manner assures us of Success. *Reprove one of Understanding* (says Solomon) *and he will understand Knowledge*, Prov. xix. 25. *Again, Give Instruction to a wise Man, and he will be yet wiser ; teach a just Man, and he will increase in Learning*, Chap. ix. 9. *Reprove such a one and he will love thee*, in the preceding Verse. *A Reproof entereth more into a wise Man than a hundred Stripes into a Fool*, as in Chap. xvii. 10.

I am unwilling to infer from his Words the proper Name that is frequently due to those who resist and repulse good Advice ; but you cannot miss of it, if you have given Ear to them.

5. And by Consequence the Reprover is to alter somewhat of his Manner, when he sets himself to rebuke one of a stubborn, thoughtless, indocile Temper, remaining in the long Habit of vicious Manners : In such Cases the Apostle St. Paul, Tit. i. 13. charges to *rebuke sharply, that they be found in the Faith* ; and again to Tim. i Ep. v. 26. *them that sin* (in such Sort) *rebuke before all, that others also may fear*. Such Sort of open Rebuke, the

wise King acquaints us, *is better than secret Love*, Prov. xxvii. 5. In another Place, *If any obey not the Word, have no Company with such a one, that he may be ashamed; yet count him not as an Enemy, but admonish him as a Brother*; and yet if he amends not of his profligate Living after the first or second Admonition, he is to be *rejected*; in like Manner as our Saviour had given Direction, that after such Admonition given, we are to *tell the Church*, that he may receive the Desert of his evil Conversation, and be a Terror to evil Doers. In our Christian Country, such are to be delivered over to the Penalties of the Laws, and the Chastisement of the civil Magistrate, whom Christianity has bound and entrusted also with the Care of suppressing Immorality and Vice.

I do not doubt to affirm that it is a highly religious and commendable Act in any private Person, to assist those publick Officers, and help the Magistrate to Information of irregular Practices and scandalous Sins; provided always that it is done, not out of any Revenge or Ill-will to the offending Person, or any sinister Ends whatsoever, but purely for religious Purposes; to advance the Benefit of our Neighbour, the Honour of God, and his Religion; provided, *secondly*, that they have before in private bestowed some charitable Expostulation and Remonstrance upon the Party; for it is always better that such amicable Applications of Rebuke should precede, and be defeated first, before any private Person proceeds to the other Course of bringing Offenders to publick Chastisement. Some are of such a callous insensible Temper, that gentle Touches and tender Rebukes will signify nothing; they have lost the Ingenuity to understand or be moved by them; but they must be roused, amazed, and as it were scarified by somewhat terrible before they feel; you must come at their Understanding thro'

thro' some strong Impression upon their Senses; thro' some Passion, vehement Pain, Punishment, or worldly Inconvenience: They have some Notion of that; and if in your good Counsel you are not very vehement and very importunate with them, they don't think you in earnest; and if you bestow that Pains, which no body indeed should grudge for their Soul's Safety, you may prevail something: However you will be commended in your Deed, if but by few in this World, by God and his holy Angels in the Life to come.

And now having suffered me a Word of Exhortation, touching the indispensable Necessity of this Duty, the incomparable Benefit of it to others and ourselves, the great Motives that persuade to the Practice; and likewise the previous Method and Manner to be observed in undertaking it; how we ought to distinguish the Person of our Neighbour, and also the Fault for which we would reprehend; have a competent Knowledge of the same; being innocent ourselves of the Imputation, or having long repented of the same Miscarriage; carefully observing the proper Time, Place, and Season of administering the Reproof, and adjusting it to the Temper and Humour of the Person; and being moreover apprised of the best Manner of addressing this Charity to our Brother; neither in Anger, nor Drollery, nor ill Language, but with all Sweetness, Gentleness, Love, and Service, and where that won't operate, with Sharpness and Severity:—What is there yet wanting to promote this neglected Duty, and accomplish our Neighbour's greatest Good?

There is one Thing still behind on the Part of the Reprover, without which there will be nothing done; and that is suitable Courage, a well assured Resolution, which is his *Sixth* and crowning Qualification.

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lification. One of the Philosophers, * besides the Virtues of Knowledge and Good-will, requires the Addition of Courage to make a successful Reprender of another Person. Not to disapprove of Sin, or be afraid of displeasing the Wicked by our seasonable Admonition for their greatest Good, is a fordid Compliance, and a sinful Temerity : The Scripture calls it, *a sewing Pillows under the Arm-Holes of Sinners*. And does not Charity to our Brother oblige us rather to venture his Anger than contribute to his Ruin, when we had a fair Probability of preventing it? Who regards his being offended, when we are about to wrench the Sword out of his Hand to prevent the wounding himself? And does not the Guilt of flagrant Sins wound him in a more dangerous Part, infinitely deeper wound him?

I have argued this Case in my former Discourse, and shewn you the Folly of this strange Coldness and Mistake in our Charity. Oh let us consider, if we thus go on, what Reasons we are laying up in Store for our Friends and Familiars, Relations and Dependants, hereafter to curse us everlastingly, for our Treachery and Cowardice, our false Modesty, our cruel Indiscretion and Negligence! for our want of Goodness, and having no Charity for their Souls; in not checking them from Sin, and restraining them from the Paths of endless Perdition! not so much as to pull them by the Sleeve, and tell them where they were going, but see them wretched without Concern, and suffer them quietly to go down into the Gulph of Destruction!—Is this our Kindness, are these our Manners and good Breeding, to forbear assisting our Neighbour in the great Article of Life eternal? Then are the Devil and his Angels the kindest and best bred Spirits. *He*

that is not for me (says Christ) *is against me, and he that gathereth not* (Souls) *with me, scattereth.* But whom fear we to displease? our Brother? But we know not even that without trying; without trying 'tis not certain we shall incur so much as his Anger, and we have nothing else to risk, and even that is like to last but a short Time.

If there is any Truth in the Wisdom of the wisest Man, he assures, that *he that rebuketh a Man, shall afterwards find more Favour than he that flattereth with his Lips,* Prov. xxviii. 23. We are not so much to consult what our Brother is corruptly, or thro' Mistake, or Inconsiderateness, actually displeased with, but only that which according to the Measures of Truth and Duty he ought to be displeased at. There is one common settled Rule whereby we ought to walk, not the various Humours of Men. And our Lord and his Apostles feared not to disoblige any Rank or Number of People, by telling them the Truth, and labouring to convert them to Righteousness: To let them alone in their Errors and Vices, would have pleased them better; but that is what they ought not to be pleased in, because the greatest and only Kindness they wanted was to be undeceived in the one, and reformed in the other.

When we prevent Sin, the Sinner may be a little angry at present, but he will surely bless us afterwards, when he comes to a sound and sober Mind. It is like rescuing a drunken or an angry Man from a Danger he was insensible of; he may for that Time blame and abuse, and call you all the impertinent Fellows to trouble yourself with him; but within how little while will he be ready to thank and praise you all his Life after? Ought his transient Frown or Resentment in any Reason to hinder our Endeavour of his eternal Benefit? Piti-
ful,
low,

low, base, Timorousness, and most childish Fear in us, if it does.

Sure we do not reflect enough, that we ought not to fear becoming any Man's Enemy, by telling him necessary and saving Truth, and discharging our Duty and a good Conscience before God. *Hast thou found me, O mine Enemy?* said *Abab* to *Elijab*. Yet *Elijab* was still the same, undaunted, and undiscouraged. And Christ our Lord hath impressed upon us the Character and Obligation of friendly Reprovers in ordinary; and wherefore should we decline, or be afraid of whan Man can do to us, in the Execution of the Duty he has appointed us?

Let this be the true Balance of the Case, Would we chuse to have God or Man for our Enemy? Why then do not we rather venture at the uncertain Displeasure of our Brother, than knowingly incur the Anger of the living God, by omitting that which he has so expressly commanded? Do we fear being rude or troublesome to our Neighbour, by offering our Service for his greatest Benefit; and which he must needs be sensible of if he has any Ingenuity? Is that the most edifying Effect of our Civility and Complaisance, to see him go head-long to the Devil without Molestation? Are these the Fruits of our pretended Love to him? to see him plunge himself deeper and deeper every Day into Damnation, without interposing one Word of Advice. Either let us have more Courage and Resolution to correct ourselves in these Omissions, or let us no longer pretend either to the sincere Love of God, or of our Neighbour.

It is now Time to proceed to the remaining Branch of Discourse, and speak a few Things of the Qualifications of him who is reprov'd, which I shall do very briefly.

Most

Most unhappy, indeed, is that Man who is unqualified either to give, or take Instruction, and good Advice: How can Reproof be effectual, if the Person it is directed to, is not so wise and considerate as to understand his own Good? The Admonished therefore should account of it, as in Reality it is, the greatest Favour that can be done them. We have all of us great Need of it, and are apt to flatter ourselves too much, and see so few Failings in our dear selves, that the Counsel both of a prudent and of a faithful Friend is invaluable. The best Commentary whereby to know a Man's self, is a true observing Friend, who can shew us our sinful Failings in the Spirit of Amity and Meekness, and so dextrously hold up the Glass, as that we cannot but acknowledge our own Picture; and when we see the Blemish to mend it. So shall we be the more beautiful, as is a Picture, when a Fault is corrected in it.

Surely, that Friend loves without Guile, or Self-Interest, who will rather risk our Resentment, and the Loss of our Friendship, than flatter, or forbear those Things which tend to our unquestionable Profit: Rather let us have a watchful Eye to those Familiars, who are either silent at our Faults, sooth us in our Frailties, or excuse our Follies; for such are certainly Cowards and Flatterers.

Whenever, therefore, they exert their Love in in our Reprehension, let us take it in good Part, tho' they do not do it so discreetly as might have been; imitating the Righteous *Job*; and forgiving the Mismanagement for the Sake of the good Intention. The Truth should lose nothing of its Value from the Default of the Suggestor: *He loves you well*, says the common Proverb, *who makes you weep.* *Faithful are the Wounds of a Friend*, is the surer and more sacred Proverb of Solomon's, *xxvii. 6. He is in the Way of Life that keepeth Instruction,*

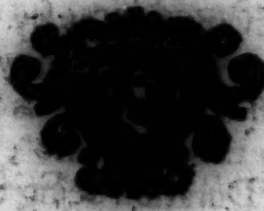
struction, but he that refuseth Reproof, erreth, chap. x. ver. 17.

We should be sure also to acknowledge our Faults, and confess that we have sinned, as did holy *David*, as soon as made sensible of it; and not only confess, but repent and amend also with him; be very thankful for such Admonition, cherish, and invite it from our Friends by a pleased Temper, and Signs of greater Endearment. But to be angry at him who reproves us secretly merely out of Kindness, is to confess that his Reproof has too much, and our Anger too little Grounds. For it is an Observation, that they who deserve most Praises, bear Reprehension with most Patience. And we ought to believe that our Friend, when he enters upon the Office of Reproving, does not tell us the Whole, but that he chuses to hint at enough to induce our Reformation, and not our Displeasure. And if he happens to blame us for some Things wherein we are not defective, we ought to look upon that as his Artifice to moderate the Blame of what we are really culpable in.

Oh! how obliged should such straying Creatures as we think ourselves to the Monitors of our Inadvertency! It would be Ingratitude and Injustice not to acknowledge the Kindness of him who has such an inviolable honest Concern for our true Interest: But it would be the greatest Want of Consideration to be angry and incensed against such a one? He can never be our Enemy, who would prevent our falling into a Precipice, and desires and designs us no worse than to be for ever happy. Foolish People profit less from a Friend telling them a Fault in Intimacy and Kindness, than a wise Man does from an Enemy accusing him in Malice.

We should put on all due Humility also, and not think ourselves above being advised. Let the proud Man be admonished, tho' never so mildly and

and lovingly, he looks on it as a Disgrace, and instead of confessing, or amending a Fault, reproaches and reproveth his Reprover, as a busy and censorious Person; and for the greatest and most precious Act of Kindness, looks on him as an Enemy. But let it not so be with us; but rather esteem the Mouth that is well instructed and discreet, as a Vessel of Gold full of precious Ointment, sending forth a most pleasant Smell, and as worthy of all Honour. *Let the Righteous smite me friendly, it shall be a Kindness; let him reprove me, it shall be as Oil upon my Head; which breaketh it not, but healeth its Wounds. Ointment and Perfume rejoice the Heart; so doth the Sweetness of a Man's Friend by hearty Counsel,* Prov. xxvii. 9. *He that confesseth his Fault, says the Son of Sirach, (Ecclus. xx. 3.) shall be preserved from Hurt. How good is it, when thou art reprov'd, to shew Repentance? For so shalt thou escape wilful Sin.* Pray God multiply and encrease the Number of zealous and discreet Reprovers, and of those who improve by them; that so we may be all blameless and irreproachable in his Sight, be found in Peace, and without Spot in the Day of our Lord Jesus Christ.





S E R M O N

The Nineteenth.

The Profit of Godliness, publick and private.

1 T I M. iv. 8. Part of the Verse.

Godliness is profitable to all Things, having the Promise of the Life that now is, and of that which is to come.

PROFIT and Advantage, conducive to Man's Happiness, is the sovereign Motive of human Action, for directing our Pursuit aright, and confirming us in the Choice of the true Ways and Means that lead unto it. And if Godliness, the Worship and Service of God in all the Duties he has commanded us, is of that extensive Advantage, as by his rewarding Favour to ensure our eternal Felicity in another Life ; and by its natural Tendency, is productive of our real Happiness in this Life also ; the Happiness of both Parts of our Duration being thus carefully consulted, and provided for by it, renders it, without all Question, the grand Interest that we can set our Hearts upon ; and well deserves to be our earliest Concern, the dearest Object of our Pursuit, and the supreme Care of our Lives.

Was

Was the Practice of our holy Religion to be constantly harrassed with Afflictions, exposed to Sufferings, and attended with the Forfeiture of all worldly Expectations, as it was its Lot upon its first Introduction into the World ; still its Future Rewards are so immensely great and glorious, far more than recompensing our Labours, and Endurance in the Lord, that its single Profitableness in that respect alone, is with every wise Man abundantly sufficient to weigh down all worldly Loss, and out-bid every Thing that offers to stand in Competition with it. But who can *find in his Heart* to with-hold or delay his Sincere Attachment to it, if it is consistent, moreover, at the same Time, with all his reasonable Pursuits, and lawful Enterprizes on this Stage of Things ; and not only consistent with, but really serviceable to the Success and Enjoyment proposed from them ?

Now, if this Godliness propounds and promises to its Followers, and actually confers upon them all that is really valuable in this Life, and the invaluable Enjoyments of a Better to come, the Words of the Text, as in the Verse after, are, to all Intents and Purposes, a *faithful Saying, and worthy of ALL Acceptation*. They are worthy at least the Attention of *all* People to examine into, and be convinced, whether these Things are so, or not ; that none may be any longer a Stranger to his greatest Interest, or jealous of his best Friends ; but discard Delusion, and become a profest Votary to his own Welfare ; or, in other Words, a real Proficient, and discreet Practiser of of godly, sober, and righteous Living.

In order to this, let us reason a little upon this wise System of Godliness, and its kind Overtures for advancing to us every Thing truly desireable in this World, and worthy of our Possession. It is needless here to use any Words to evince that he
who

who leads a godly Life is entitled to Happiness in a future State; that is taken for granted, being Matter of first Belief to all Christians, however the unsuitable Lives of some puts *their* particular Belief out of Countenance. What we have to deliberate upon, is in respect to the other Point, which the Impatience of some, and the Unattention or Misapprehension of others, have rendered less obvious.

Now, as God has made Man a sociable Creature, he has by that very Situation of him, with respect both to his Body and Soul, ordained that he should receive his Enjoyments, or Well-being, in Society. But what a crude, tumultuous, unsafe Thing must Society necessarily be, without Government to marshal it into proper Subordination, ward off Injury from Particulars, and preserve the Peace? We may be sure then that God, who superintends the Blessings of Society, is the Founder of Government in general, and *that the Powers that are*, in the World, for that End (however diversified like all his other Works) *are ordained of him*. And if he is the Author of the End, *i. e.* if Order and Government in the World is of divine Right, he must, in the Connection of Things, be the Author also of the Means, or, in other Words, of the *social* Virtues conducive to the End; consequently the Founder is always to be had in Remembrance, and never left out of the Thoughts of the governing, or governed Members of every District, Kingdom, or Empire. Both Parties should have their Reference to him, and in their respective Conduct, and relative Duties of Protection, and Measures of Submission, carefully consult what is the *Founder's* Will in the Case. And what is that but to rule and obey well, out of *Conscience* unto him, and to the End of Government; considering the great Account they must one Day give?

It must be evident then, that whatever, and how many soever Pillars of Civil Laws are erected for the Support of any particular Government, God and Conscience are the Basis of them all; and a due Regard had to both, is the internal and most fundamental Security of Peace, and Order, and Property, and every Comfort of Government, and all the Blessings of Society. And what is it that pleases God, the Patron of this Good, and what is it that maintains Conscience, his Deputy for the Conservation of it, and distinguishes that which is a good Conscience from a bad one, but Godliness and true Religion? The living in his Fear, and in Expectation of his present and future Favour; reverencing his Word and Revelation (wherever promulged) and fulfilling his Commandments however made known? And who can so much as hope to preserve from foreign Enemies the *external* Peace and Safety of any Country, exclusive of him, whilst they are regardless of his Favour and Interposal; or reasonably expect any Thing less than some publick Mark of divine Anger and Resentment, when and where national Wickedness is grown to such a Height as to incense God against any People, and from being their old Friend, through the Foolishness of a general Licentiousness and Contempt of Religion and Conscience, provoke him to be their Enemy and Avenger? But on the other Hand, who can doubt his continual Protection over, and Blessing upon, that Publick, where Truth and Justice, Religion and Piety, generally prevail?

Kingdoms and States must receive *their* Rewards and Punishments, enjoy the Promises, or incur the Threats of Almighty God, in this Life *only*; because, as such, they exist not in another. The *Jews* are a remarkable Instance of divine Conduct and national Providence in this Respect. They are

known to every Body that reads their History, to have flourished in all sorts of Prosperity, in all their Borders, and to have groaned under all kind of Adversity ; to beat their Enemies, or be beaten by them, just in proportion as their publick Behaviour engaged the Smiles or Frowns of God, their immediate King and Founder. They are now no more a Nation ; but crumbled among all Nations, as so many Monuments all the World over, that publick Good is to be expected from the Observance of municipal Laws, and from the Favour and Friendship of God ; and that publick Evil and Calamity, must be expected from the contrary Practice.—*Such a Righteousness doubtless exalteth any Nation that shall be famous for it ; and such a Sin as the Neglect of it, is a blasting Reproach, and a periodical Ruin to any People, in any Part of the World.*

Misery and Ruin, publick and private, are in Truth the natural Consequences of Wickedness and Vice, as well as the providential Retribution of the divine Governor. They are, as they increase and multiply, the publick Occasion of all Disorders in Society, and Distempers in a State ; the Body politick is unavoidably affected and impaired in its Tranquility and Order ; and the Body private, or particular Persons addicted to its Irregularities, commonly suffer in many Respects, in the Peace of their Mind, and their future Hopes from God at the last, and so are the guilty Authors of multifarious Mischief to themselves, and to others. Whereas God and Virtue are the original Authors and chief Supporters of Order, Peace, and Love, in domestick, and in civil Life ; out of which arise mutual Services, Benevolence, and Enjoyments that are expected universally from the Communities of Men. And in both Respects, Religion

gion and Virtue are of that sovereign Use and Benefit to us, jointly and severally, as to be as requisite and necessary to our Happiness in this Life present, as to our Expectation of being saved in that which is to come.

Are not Avarice, Ambition, Luxury, Vices that peculiarly arise out of Society, unpractised in savage Countries, and that abound most in the most prospered Kingdoms, best moderated by Dictates of Religion, and Apprehensions of Duty to God? For, what is it, after all, but the *wrong Opinion* Men have of Honour, Riches, Pleasure, that produces this pestilent Ambition, Avarice, and Luxury, which fatally disturb the Harmony and enervate the Health of Society, and are such sensible Sources of so many internal Evils? But is not *that* Opinion set to rights, and reduced to Reason and Virtue, by a sincere Regard to practical Religion? Or, what is it that possesses so many with those wrong Notions and irregular Pursuits, but the Disregard thereof? For,

Let but the Means that Ambition uses for attaining its End of Honour and Glory (and it commonly sticks at no Means whatsoever to compass it) be but legal and virtuous, it ceases to be Ambition, it becomes Emulation in Virtue, and a Pre-eminency of doing Good. Let the Means, which the grasping Temper makes use of for enlarging a Fortune, be all circumscribed within the Bounds of Fair-dealing, and attended by *social* Self-love in the Tributes of Beneficence to others according to Opportunity; it loses the Name of sordid Parsimony, or griping Covetousness, and puts on the Character of prudential Economy.—Let the several Means and Provisions for Pleasure and bodily Gratifications, be regularly within Bounds, and proper to the State and Circumstances of a Man's Life, they then retain the Delicacies and Flavour that

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God and Nature bestow'd upon them : And whilst they keep clear of your sumptuous, fantastick Extravagancies, it has no longer the Name of Luxury, but is happily delivered from Temptations for gratifying boundless and ungoverned Appetites.— When in these Particulars, a Man's *Moderation is known unto all Men*, he is known to be a wise and good Man, and a valuable Citizen ; able to govern himself, and, when called to it, is fitter to govern others.

The wrathful Sword of the civil Magistrate, may indeed punish and lessen the *outward* Injuries and Disorders that proceed from Deceit and Falshood, Malice, Envy, and Revenge ; but what can restrain the secret, the undetected, Practices of those bad Principles, which daily injure Multitudes of Citizens, unless the Fear of the Displeasure of God, who only knows, and has strictly forbidden them, as much as the other interposes to put a stop to them ? Restraints of human Laws may be evaded many Ways (as we daily see) where there is not Restraint enough of Conscience for obeying them to their true Intent and Purpose. The Magistrate, accordingly, is but half obeyed in fact, when Submission and Compliance proceed only from *Wrath*, and not from that *Conscience Sake* which our holy Religion would supply. The Badness, therefore, of the Subjects Conscience, will evermore be the Occasion of multiplying Statute Laws without End : And the more they multiply, the more evident it is, that there is a Defect of Conscience and Probity among that People. A great Evil, and a sad Complaint, is never to be redressed, but by the Influence of the Laws and Statutes that God Almighty, the supreme Legislator and Governor of Society, has ordained over Conscience, for Governors to rule *in his Fear*, and for Subjects to obey in *all Godliness and Honesty*.

What

What Inquietude, moreover, and Distress of social Life, spring from Moroseness, Pride, Ingratitude, Envy at, or Flattery of, Superiors? from Unfaithfulness, Insincerity, and Lies, with innumerable other ill Qualities, which human Laws can neither remedy nor prevent? Yet they would all be banished, and their Contraries succeed in their Place, to bless the Christian World, were the Obligations of our Religion sufficiently minded.—— Hence it follows, that Religion can both forward and restrain, what the civil Magistrate and his Laws can neither abolish, nor establish, with respect to *several* social Virtues, and Vices, which increase Contentment, or Dissatisfaction in Life.

Now the Defect of the Magistrate and civil Institute, and the Plenitude of Religion for these Purposes, will be equally manifest from this Consideration. The chief Thing that the former can do, is to prevent or redress Wrong, by making an Example of the Wrong-doers:---But as to the Encouragement of Virtue and Obedience, they must ever remain deficient; and that keeps us to the uniform Reason, why so many in all Governments are discontented, for not obtaining Places of Profit or Honour, whilst they think and know themselves to be equally well-affected and obedient. The civil supreme Ruler cannot possibly furnish out Rewards to all obedient Subjects, other than equal Protection in their hereditary Liberties, and Properties of their own acquiring. But here Religion (that fast Friend to Government and Magistracy) steps in, and universally supplies what no civil Government can possibly do, by propounding to, and ascertaining every Subject of a *Reward* in a future Life, for his due Obedience to Governors, and other his social Virtues here. And as that future Life has its Recompences, and without Envy, for *all*, of all Ranks and Stations here below; who

are found to *fear God, honour the King, and love one another*; it is plain, that nothing can maintain this Field of human Action, or continue the Scene of general Happiness in Society, but God, and Respect had to him, his Religion, and its Rewards.-- And were Religious Punishments more feared than Human, as they ought to be, there could be no such Thing as a bad Subject.

Indeed, the temporal Promises to the *Jews*, who were under a temporal Covenant, with respect to the Land of *Canaan* flowing with Milk and Honey, are not perfectly parallel, nor exactly applicable to Christians, under a better Covenant, who have more clear and enlarged Promises of a Life to come, and have our Portion and Expectations in this Life more contracted and better fixed, by giving us a true and solid Judgment what this present World really is to us.— And such Moderation from the best and last Instructor, must needs best become the State and Duration of the Things of this World. For, how unwise is it to be immoderately fond of that, the Tenure of whose Possession is Uncertainty in the Nature of Things?

It appears then, that Religion preserved in its just Reverence, and practised in its due Effect, is *more* than a Help-mate to the Magistrate; it is so necessary and essential to good Government, that he could effect little or nothing without it. Really and truly, whenever he pleases to consider it, it is the very Ground whereon the Magistrate himself stands, and wherever that is undermined by Infidelity, or depressed by licentious Immorality, and notorious Wickedness, the Fear and Reverence of himself sinks with it, and the civil Laws fall under Contempt, as well as the Divine. Sooner or later every Civil Governor, and all that have a Share of Power under him, will find their own Authority slighted and neglected by the People that were under

der them, in proportion as the Honour and Authority of God, and his Worship, are undervalued and neglected by themselves, and suffered generally to be so by their Subjects. For it is natural and of Course to expect, that they who are allowed the Liberty to condemn and think meanly of the *Original*, will take the Liberty to have as low an Opinion of the Copy and Representative. In like manner, in the private Governments of Children and Servants, those Nurseries of publick Order and Subordination, the Authority that should be preserved there, is found to be diminished, or set at naught, in equal Degree as the Fear of God, and the Duties owing to him, are untaught and unimpressed by Example and Instruction.

So that, in every one of these three Authorities, which comprehend all the Civil Authority that is in Society, where the respective Superiors countenance the Influence of good Conscience and Religion, and all the publick Methods and Persons for promoting the same, they countenance themselves; and as long as they protect and encourage these, they preserve themselves, and find their Account in the greater Reverence and better Submission that is paid unto them.

On the other Hand, they as constantly find the Mischief recoil, and every where feel themselves disrespected and unbeyed, if not wounded and abused, from the Disesteem, Abuses, and Wounds they indolently suffer to be cast upon the other: And that most justly, and without Pity: Seeing they had it in their Power to have prevented it, in their several Spheres: God entrusted them with Power for that Purpose; and they must answer to him hereafter for the Breach of that Trust, as well as suffer for it here from factious and dissatisfied Subjects, undutiful Children, negligent and unfaithful Servants. Thus God, just and righteous in

all his Ways, revenges his own Quarrel, in setting them to naught who do so by him.

Is not a judicial Oath the great Instrument the Magistrate depends upon in the Execution of the Laws, and the Discharge of his Trust, for distinguishing Property, and distributing Right, by discovering the Criminals who disturb or evade it, secrete or purloin it? And what is that, but an Act of Religion, as it is an Appeal to God, a Reference had and made from the Deputy to the *Principal* in Authority over the Actions of Man? And that being under God, and in the Fear and Help of him, the Preservative of Life, Property, and Reputation among Men, was the Law of an Oath kept by every one, (as *Solomon* advises the divine Law to be kept, *Prov. vii. 3.*) as *the Apple of thine Eye*, how safe and appropriate would those Tenures be? Right would be unavoidable when it is in Judicature, and Perjury unknown. And what makes the Crime or Complaint of that infamous Wickedness, that dreadful Subversion of Truth and Right to be heard of in any Christian Country, but the Prostitution of Conscience, the Poison of Infidelity, the Scorn of Religion, and Debauchery of Morals, which have got Footing there? We, if *we* begin to feel and bewail it, may be sure it is the Gangreen of the Community; and wherever that prevails, we may pronounce, that the Plague is begun among that People.—

Yet it is not to be dissembled, that the Profanation of Oaths, which infects the Conversation of many People, disgraces our Streets, and pierces the Hearts of the Passers-by, has a fatal Tendency to increase that Calamity. — That silly wicked Custom (to say nothing how provoking it is to God) is certainly pernicious to Society, as the Familiarity of it lowers the Sacredness, and diminishes the Sanctity of judicious Swearing, upon which all our
Safety

Safety depends. If that Custom proceeds from the Infection of bad Example, working upon the Idleness and Heedlessness of Conscience that abounds among the many; the Cure will be, besides the Magistrate's Coercion or Discountenance, to induce such People to spend the Lord's Day at Church, which they commonly mispend in Company that teach those evil Habits. By regarding that Day, and frequenting that Place, they would by Degrees wear themselves of this Vice, and, as their Conscience gathered Strength, Soundness, and serious Consideration, throw off that inexcusable Folly.— And can any Thing be said more for the utter Abolishment of this Evil than what the Christian Institutes forbid, by forbidding us *to swear at all*.— Not at all in common Conversation; which was the immediate Subject of our Lord's Reprehension; in order that an Oath, which is an Exercise of Religion, the End of Controversy, and the Right Hand of the civil Magistrate, might be maintained sacred, and upright, and unsuspected before all the People.—

Thus the Religion we profess, reduced to general Practice, superintends all the Blessings, and would banish every Evil out of Community.

They, therefore, among other Corrupters and Disparagers of Christianity, must be in the Wrong, who distinguish and separate Morality from Religion, and by so doing industriously create a Misunderstanding between the Means and the End; the best Means in all the World to that End. This is known to be the Principle of the Deists, directly levelled against the Religion, and I wish it may not be found indirectly, at least, against the Government of their Country. For is it not most notorious that the declared End of Christianity is to promote sober, righteous, and godly living? Is there

there any better Morality than this? And does not the Magistrate, the Christian Magistrate, think himself interested above all others, to protect and promote it? Or, in favouring that End, can he with-hold his Encouragement of the best Means and Method from Heaven for accomplishing it? And as a Country may as well be ruined from within itself, as from a Foreign Invasion; and Mankind can have no Enjoyment, Convenience, or Security out of Society, or wherein God and good Morals are disregarded; what little Friends, how great Enemies rather to Mankind must they be accounted, who encourage Principles which dissociate and confound them, by *calling Evil Good, and Good Evil, putting Darknes for Light, and Light for Darknes?*

Let us in the next Place turn the Discourse to the private Advantages in this Life, that are derivable from the Practice of Godliness; and they are the first Things that People in particular have an Eye to, when any Thing is proposed in common.

And here two Things are to be premised; one arising out of the Nature of Things, the other from the wise Course of divine Providence.

Of the first Kind is that proper Observation, That Christianity is not so calculated for this World as to introduce Alterations upon its Account, in the secular State of its Disciples: It promises no such Thing; but it engages and undertakes, with our own Consent, to make us happy in that State it finds us in. It is none of its Affair to make an Alteration in the Constitution *Civil*, for bringing all Governments into one Model; or in the Constitution *Personal*, so as to exempt any good or bad Person from the Common Law of Sicknes, Vicissitudes, and what is called Chances in Life; nor yet to remove the *temporal* bad Effects of past Sins and Indiscretions,

com-

committed by ourselves or Ancestors. This follows from the Maxim of its Lord and Master, *My Kingdom is not of this World.*—

Of the second Kind is the necessary and comfortable Reference that is to be had to divine Providence, extraordinarily and for particular Reasons, distributing, as it was promiscuously, to good and bad Men, the outward Goods and Evils, Prosperity and Adversity of human Life. These Tokens and Expences of God's governing the World, and controuling the probable Issues of human Endeavours, are set up every where for salutary Ends ; to establish those who love and fear him more and more in that Fundamental of the Life of Faith, that their good Things do not lie in this, but are prepared for them in another and better World, as often as they find themselves unprosperous, or see the Wicked, who can have no Pretence to the Favour of God as long as they continue such, wantoning in their short-lived Abundances here below, and when they feel themselves sometimes indiscriminately plunged in Sufferings and Afflictions, that it is then their Duty not to be cast down, but to erect their Heads, considering how by good Conduct under them, they have the Opportunity and Honour conferred upon them of proving their Relation to another World, and convincing Men that those very Ways of Providence tending to that Proof, are wise ; and that future Rewards and Punishments are as sure and certain hereafter, as the other are uncertain and promiscuous here.

These Exceptions being admitted, and proper Allowance made with regard to particular Persons and Circumstances, Times and Seasons, the sincere Ways of Virtue and Godliness are the directest, as well as the pleasantest Road we can possibly think

think of to those worldly Acquisitions we are most commonly desirous of.—Would we then either promote our temporal Felicity, or enjoy it? How serviceable to both these Purposes is Temperance, as it assists every Man in his Capacity for the Business of his Calling? How requisite and necessary is the Wisdom of the Serpent in conjunction with the Innocence of the Dove, in transacting the Affairs of Life? When they go Hand in Hand, we more securely enjoy what we have, provide against probable Futurities, make the best of present Circumstances, improve Opportunities, decline Hazards, and escape Abuses and Impositions. Whilst that Affability, and obliging Disposition to all we converse with, which flows from Christian Prudence, engages their Esteem and Friendship, and disposes them to do us good Offices, as they have Opportunity.—It is the Nature of Mankind to retaliate either good or bad Usage, as they receive it. Every one, therefore, has it pretty certainly at his own Choice which he will receive, by first beginning and settling that Commerce himself which his Religion prompts him to. By which Means of promoting the Interest and Good Name of another, does he not pursue the most probable Method in the Course of the World, for others to do him the like Kindness? And he who is so obedient of its Precepts, as to do No-body any Harm, goes in no Fear of any Person's Malice or Revenge. Or, in Case we should not be able to secure a fast Friendship with those who are able to promise us; or, should they disappoint us; still is it not the wisest Management to have no Enemies, meet with few Injuries, and lessen Ill-Treatment from the World? And are not these beneficial Virtues recommended in the Christian Religion to all its Professors?

But

But to be more particular.——As all earthly Pursuits center in some or all of these Objects, Riches, Pleasure, Honour; it will give us a better Opinion of Religion, if it can be made good, that the Practice of it is the likeliest Way and Means in the World to attain each and every of them.

I. With respect to *Riches*, I shall not recite the general Promises which the Scripture has annexed to such wise Practice, wherein we have all imaginable Grounds to place a general Affiance; but chuse to account for it in a natural prudential Way, and on this Account, shew it to be the best of all Methods to advance our Fortune, as far as our own Endeavours, or any Rules and Directions contribute to it.——For there may be many Contingencies of Deaths of Relations, Kindness of Friends, providential Hits in Business, which may heap up Riches upon some Persons, without their own seeking, and beyond their Expectation. But bating these Extraordinaries, or else allowing them equally to the religious good Man, the religious good Man has greatly the Advantage over the Wicked, in regard to Thriving.——

The Wisdom of this World suggests two Ways for this. One is the *prudent Art of Getting*; the other, the *prudent Art of Keeping*; and the Laws of Christian Prudence and Religion enforce both of these. *First*, As to the getting Part, nothing furthers and improves that Skill so much as Prudence, Industry, Diligence, Fair-dealing, and courteous Deportment in one's Calling. *Secondly*, as to the proper Degree of keeping what is got, so essential to those who would grow richer; Frugality and good Husbandry being Branches of Christian Prudence, are again recommended by the same Religion: And Prodigality, under whatever Name of Pro-

Profuseness and Luxury, being an Intemperance *in all Things*, is arraigned as the Reverse of its Precepts.— If Industry presides on one Hand of a rising Fortune, and Frugality on the other Hand of it, our Religion enjoining both these, joins Hand in Hand, as it were, to enrich her Profelytes.-- And at the same Time the avaritious Appetite of getting, and the sordid Measures of keeping Wealth, are strictly restrained as pernicious to our Ease ; whilst the Trust and Design of God in bestowing them, is enjoyable from the pleasing Reflections of doing Good, and the Prospect of a future Recompence.

If some greedy-minded People, who make too much haste, and in their Haste stick at nothing to be rich, imagine that Fraud or Extortion, or any of the circumventing Arts, are the nearest Road to their proposed End, they most notoriously mistake, and cheat themselves all the Time, even to a Proverb : The long constant Observation of the World has given it against them, and established the contrary into a familiar Maxim. All Things duly weighed, the good Sense of that known Maxim is the most circumspect Behaviour, and the shrewdest of all Stratagems to make a Man prosper. Forasmuch as the other sinister Way once detected blasts all a Man's Projects, and empoverishes his Designs ever after : To say nothing of that providential Canker, which in a Generation or two is observed to eat up and consume unjust Gettings.

On the other Hand, how chargeable and expensive are the Vices of Sensuality ? They frequently, in proportion to the Excess, bring a Mortgage upon the Estate, of more or less, and we often see its beggarly Consequences in bringing a Man to a Morsel of Bread, clothing his Back with Rags, and giving his Breast a full Meal of Chagrin and worldly

worldly Sorrow for his past Misconduct. I wish we could change it into *Godly Sorrow*; but that seldom happens.—

But here it is to be distinguished (what was never intended of God, and therefore ought to be observed by all who treat of this Subject) that the true Meaning of the Tendency of Godliness to profit us this Way, is not to be extended to Extremes, as if every godly Person must *therefore* acquire a large Fortune. If he is that godly Person, he very well knows that to be impossible; for, supposing every one, in all Degrees of Life, to be what they ought to be, as good as himself, was every one to be prospered alike, there would be an End of Society, by levelling all that Subordination of Property and Possession whereon it subsists, and can only flourish. He knows, moreover, that he needs not such an Affluence of Fortune, if he has wherewithal to supply Wants, and furnish Decencies suitable to the Condition he is placed in. Still there is no impeaching the Truth of God or his Promises. For what can a divine Promise of this Life intend but its Happiness? But if the Happiness of it does chiefly, if not solely, consist in a perfect Contentment with our Condition, in an inward Peace and Tranquility, (without which there can be no such Thing as Enjoyment) does not the Practice of Religion, and the Sense of divine Favour, make a Man abound in these better Possessions; Possessions that no worldly Oppressor can take away?

To these, indeed, and to no other, whose Treasure is God and Heaven, the Things of this Life are truly and properly a Fruition: And that for two divine Reasons, (1.) Because they are an *Addition*. (2.) Because they are the *Promise* of God. Whereas to the Ungodly, they are neither an Addition nor a Promise: Not an Addition; because they are the *Total* of their poor Treasure and Happiness;

piness: Not a Promise, or the least Effect of it, or any proper Taste or Distinction of the divine Favour; no; nothing more than the indiscriminate Exuberance which distributes Sun and Rain to the Unthankful and Disobedient.—And by so much as the Good Man enjoys the Conscience of serving God sincerely, and the Consequence of that, the Sense of his Favour, he is more completely happy in the Fruition of a little, than others of another Temper possibly can be in never such Abundance. I proceed,

2dly, To observe the Tendency of Religion to promote likewise our *Pleasures*. And if we begin with Health, that Salt that preserves and flavours all sublunary Enjoyments; this we find is one of a double Tenure. If we regard the Health of the Mind, which is the Feeling and Foundation of all, its Serenity is as much a natural Growth of Godliness, as the Grape is of the Vine; and God has been pleased to connect the former together as he has the latter. As to the Health of the Body; what can pretend to preserve that better than those Rules for Moderation of the Passions, and Government of the Appetites, wherewith it abounds? And in Neglect of them, what Pains and Disorders, Waste and Havock, is brought into the Constitution by indulged Excesses, tending to shorten the Days of Life, not seldom to one half of what they might otherwise have been extended to?

Did our sober Religion govern the People more than it does; were its temperate Directions tolerably regarded; what a deal of Trouble might be saved to the Magistrate for hindering the common Strength, Labour, and Defence of the Community from being enervated with a cheap Intemperance, and from becoming useless or profligate from that frequent Intoxication? — Whereas the godly Man is safe and sound from these Inconveniences, and

and commonly lives to good old Age. *Length of Days* is his promised Portion, and the Fear of the Lord, and departing from Evil, ensure *Health to his Navel, and Marrow to his Bones*; as often as Firmness of Health, and long Life, is best for him upon the Whole.

Some particular strong Constitutions of the Wicked, and weak ones of the Virtuous, may make a few Exceptions, but not disprove the general Observation: For both the weak and the strong Constitution is promiscuously the Lot of either of them, and hence Death seizes each indiscriminately: But supposing an hale athletick State of Body the Portion of the godly Man, it will wear the best with him, and hold out the longest by far.—

As to the Pleasures of Conversation, Christianity greatly improves all the obliging Arts and innocent Ways of social Life. What is Conversation without Sincerity, but a Stratagem upon one another? And what teaches that Excellence, or impresses it so much as the Christian Religion, for rendering Conversation free and easy, and disincumbered from mutual Distrust, and Disguises?—

With respect to the Gratification of those Appetites which Nature has planted in us, there is no one Satisfaction or Enjoyment denied, that is worthy of our Nature to have, or can consist with the Rights and Prosperity of Society. Nothing is restrained but what is really prejudicial to the social or private Life, as all Excess beyond the limited Bounds is to the one, or the other. All that is required uniformly of the World is, to be what we were made to be, Men, rational Creatures; Reason striving for the Mastery, and able to maintain it over Sense, not suffering it to be only, but commanding it into Subjection to an higher Purpose of Life. Under this Restraint none of the Pleasures of Sense are infringed, but enhanced, and become

an uniform, innocent Habit of Enjoyment. And how much more delectable is Freedom of Action and Dominion over a Man's self, than Slavery to unmortified Lusts and ungoverned Affections?—

An innocent Course of Action, moreover, not only feasts the Mind with Joy and Peace, that a *Stranger*, or irregular Person, *intermeddles not with*, nor has any Notion of; but the *Conscience void of Offence* sweetens all the cross Accidents to which human Life is subject, and at last *makes his Bed in his Sickness*; and, as Life fails, cheers the departing Spirit with the Cordial of future and eternal Happiness.—Whilst the Wicked are fretted with Disappointments, and, *like the troubled Sea, tossed from and to* all Points with Storms of Passion, and the gathering Clouds of sinking Fears, the Spirit within, which should sustain the Infirmities, is wounded and unable to sustain itself: The Reason and Reflection of the Ungodly, which is the Cure of other Grievs, is itself convulsed with Anguish under the Consciousness of having God their Enemy. Thus Guilt imbitters their worldly Possessions, and turns the outward Laughter of them into inward Heaviness. They have no Relish of Life; no, not of the Prosperity of it: They constantly sink under Adversity, and are afraid to die.—Pleasure, therefore, in its best Relish and highest Flavour, is on the Side of Virtue, and upon no account whatsoever derivable from Vice and Irregularity. Permit me a few Words on the

Third Pursuit of human Life, Honour. Does any thirst after a good Opinion among his Neighbours, or general Fame in the World, or posthumous Praise when he is dead? Now none of these Reputations can ever be erected or hoped for, but upon the Foundation of Virtue, Worth, and Usefulness. A general good Name must be laid in the Merit of being Good and doing Good: Being serviceable

viceable to our Country, useful in our Generation, promoting the Welfare of others in our Station, to the utmost of our Power, discharging faithfully and peaceably all the Offices of Life, publick and private. This Branch of publick Godliness, and the *Fear of the Lord*, wherein every *Righteous Man* is known to *abound*, and to be more *excellent than his Neighbour*, in the Scripture Phrase, is sure to gain the Esteem and Good Opinion of Contemporaries, endear us to our Fellow Creatures, and perfume and perpetuate our Memory when we are gone.

Thus have I shewn the Tendency of this incomparable Godliness to promote our temporal Felicity in regard to the three Grand Objects, Riches, Pleasure, and Honour, which are so much worshipped in this World. And that Happiness, or *unknown God*, which Men ignorantly worship in them, is to be found in the Religion which our Apostle preaches.

And, if it has appeared to be not only consistent with, but the greatest Furtherer of, all the lawful Affairs and Interests we busy ourselves with here below; then it must be admitted on all Hands to be the gainfullest of all Things we can set our Heart upon in this Life; and that in *keeping its easy Precept there is great Reward*: Great, indeed, when the three great Rewards of this World last mentioned attend upon it, and inconceivably greater and more lasting in a Life to come. Political Wisdom is much studied in this Age; but I am sure Christian Prudence provides effectually for *both* Worlds, which no other Policy projects, or so much as thinks of.—

Let us then, in Conclusion, be won over by the Importunities of our excellent Religion, which appear to have no other Aim but our Happi-

ness in both Stages of our Being, this and the next Life. Upon Condition we will consent to do the best for ourselves in this World, it promises to make us happy for evermore. It strows our Way with sublunary good Things, and holds out Heaven hereafter. What can it offer? what can we desire further?—

And since this, by being the best Wisdom of every Particular, is so undeniably our publick best Understanding of Things also, should we not, I beseech you, endeavour to be esteemed a wise and understanding People in the Sight of the Nations round about us? When we are so wise as to join together, every one in his Sphere taking his Part, for purging from among us general Licentiousness, together with the too prevailing Contempt of that Religion which is to preserve us in this World, and save us in the next; and so securing the Patron of Christians and the Governor of Nations for our Friend and Patron, we shall be deemed, and we shall be feared, as an invincible People.—

In a Word, how can we possibly do a wiser Thing than to make it our Care to study, and put in Practice this most admirable Prudence of Godliness, seeing it procures all that is valuable and desirable in Life, carries on the Interests of both Worlds, saves all Hazards, secures all Things?——To be neglectful of our Interest in the best Calculation and Balance, is that preposterous Folly I trust none here will be guilty of. I am sure, if they are, they deserve the Vengeance of the utmost Perdition, if not for their Sins, at least, for their very Folly :

Which God of his infinite Mercy avert, for the Sake of Jesus Christ !

S E R-



S E R M O N

The Twentieth.

*The Advantage of Considering our
Ways.*

HAGGAI i. 5, or 7.

Thus saith the Lord of Hosts, Consider your Ways.

WE have here a Duty recommended by a Prophet of the Lord, and a Preacher to *Israel*, of the very greatest Importance that can be urged ; in as much as Consideration is that which must lead us into all After-Duties, and shew us the Number of our Errors, and the Kind of our Miscarriages, the best Time when, and Method how we ought to amend them. If you are desirous to know the best Preparation to whatever we read, or hear that is good, the Text presents you with it : With it, almost every Thing that can instruct or remind us ; and without it, we find in Fact neither Discourses ever so frequent from the Pulpit, nor Advices ever so importunate from Friends, nor any other Occurrence that offers Warning and Wisdom, have any Influence upon us : Not the Holy Scriptures, the Arguments of God Almighty himself, his Promises, his

B b 3

Threats,

Threats, his most earnest Invitations to Happiness therein displayed; not the Conviction of Conscience, nor his Mercies, nor his Judgments, can bring us to Virtue and himself; or move us, thoughtless and unconcerned, one Step from the Error of our Ways; till we reflect how crooked and shameful, how erroneous and ruinous they are; till we *consider*, till we give heed to, and revolve in our Minds the Force and Reasonableness of the Arguments that would persuade us to forsake them; how inviting the Motives, how great and sure the Rewards; how severe and lasting the Punishments; and how effectual the Assistance, *i. e.* in the Words of the Text, till *we consider our Ways. Thus saith the Lord of Hosts, Consider your Ways.*

And that the People might be awakened to listen to the Importance of them, they are repeated in the Compass of two Verses; and indeed all Pains are little enough to inculcate Wisdom, yet no Wisdom is more incumbent upon you to learn perfectly, nor any more necessary to be remembered. It is in this we profess to be most serviceable to you from this Place, not so much to instruct, as to prevail with you to consider religiously of those Things which you already know of Religion; to appeal from yourselves, thoughtless and inconsiderate, to your own wiser selves, as often as you think and reflect. And who can dislike to be made wiser in this agreeable Way; which aims at making your own Thoughts your Tutor, and to put them upon advising you of the useful Wisdom, the great necessary Instruction of Happiness? After all is said and done, that must proceed from your own Thoughts: Other Wisdom may be taken up from other Men's in a tenacious Memory; but Happiness must be the Choice of the Mind, the Bent and Pursuit of our own Wills; and the Thoughts, Reasonings, or Persuasives of others can only be conducive

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cive in correcting or forwarding the former, when they work together with, and in our own Thoughts. Then will Nourishment and Good to the Soul ensue, when serious Thoughtfulness has been digesting and extracting it.

According to St. Peter's Method, *not as tho' you were ignorant, but by the Way of stirring up your pure Hearts, by Way of Remembrance to do you Good*, permit me therefore to recommend with the Earnestness it deserves, this momentous Duty, this Ground-work of all your spiritual Edifications, whilst I discourse,

I. Of the Necessity and Advantage of Consideration, as a Duty incumbent upon all Christians at all Times.

II. As a Duty particularly necessary to Hearers at such Times as this.

And then, in the III^d Place, I shall enforce it in both Respects from the Inforcement of the Prophet, *Thus saith the Lord of Hosts, Consider your Ways.*

First, I am to shew the Necessity and Advantage of Consideration, as a Duty in general. And what can more clearly evince this, than that evident Observation and universal Self-Accusation, that all the Wickedness and Folly committed in the World are owing to the Want of this. If the Sins and Vices of some among us may be charged upon Infidelity and Unbelief, what else can that Infidelity be imputed to but half-thinking, and imperfectly considering the Revelations God has been pleased to make of himself in Scripture?

With respect to those innumerable Many who receive and believe those concerning Truths, what

Account can possibly be given of the Inconsistency of their Lives to them, but that either they do not at all estimate the Greatness of the Proposals, seldom compare them with the little Conveniencies and Vanities of this Life ; or consider the Terms by Halves, and think of the Motives in Haste ? This is the true Reason why such Multitudes of Christian Professors finally perish and miscarry, not for want of believing, but for lack of pondering and considering the Articles they profess to believe : This is the Cause why Religion remains in the Heads and Tongues of so many, and passes the Hearts of so few ; where it should live and operate in its proper Seat, as a new Principle, *renewing us in the Spirit of the Mind*, changing the Heart of the old Man and Sinner, regulating the corrupt Will (that Spring of human Action so prone to what is evil) till by Degrees it gains a new Bent, and the Objects of the Affections are new chosen, and the Actions and the Endeavours thereof are turned from what is to be left undone, to that which is lawful and right, and commanded to be done ; and the new Man, *i. e.* the real Christian, has *his Fruit unto Holiness, and his End everlasting Life.*

Why does the most excellent of all Religions, and the greatest Overtures of rich Grace, lose their Design upon us, which is the *purifying our Hearts* and reforming our Lives, in order to make us exceeding happy ; but because we embrace those Truths loosely, and in a literal Knowledge, and a Conviction to no Purpose, without suffering the Powers of our Will to be influenced by them in particular, in a close Application of *what Manner of Persons they oblige us to be in all holy Conversation* ? Thus we perish in our Knowledge and Belief, with the most forcible Motives to the contrary in our very Hands, whilst we consider and apply them not ; whereas there was nothing but a thorough
sedate.

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edate Thinking upon the eternal Moment and Consequence of Things wanting, to have *added Virtue to Knowledge*, and to have let in Amendment to our Lives, and Righteousness to our Actions, and open the Door of Salvation to the Soul.

For let Men but weigh and consider,—There is no more Reality, no more Competition or Comparison, between the great and glorious Things of the other World and the despicable ones of this, their respective Interests and Advantages on the one Hand, balanced with the Sufferings and Inconveniencies on the other, than there is between a Shadow and Substance: And it is as impossible for Men to mistake in the Preference of a Shadow that soon passes by, and a Substance that remaineth always, provided they will but open the Eyes of their Mind, to behold. All the Excellence and Beauty of Virtue is lost, and the Deformity of Vice equally hid to those that keep their Eyes close shut. The written Word of God, the Oracle of these Things, (as *Isaiab* represents) will be as a sealed Book to us, if we seal up the Attention and spiritual Discernment of our Eyes and Ears: And shut they will ever be, unless Consideration opens them; but when once they begin to open, and consider, and view a while, there appears as much Difference between them as between Light and Darkness, a short Season and Eternity, Happiness and Misery, and they wonder now at nothing so much as their former Infatuation.

Were the Arguments for Religion ever so much greater than they are (was that possible) still they can be but Arguments, and can do no more than persuade; and it is in our Power not to be persuaded by them, only by not weighing and considering them duly: Let them be fairly and deliberately attended to, and we already enjoy the Certainty of being prevailed upon by them: Nothing can withstand their Force, but our casting them out of our
Minds,

Minds, and when we begin to think, still suffering some Trifle or other unreasonably to drive it out of our Thoughts, till a *more convenient Season*; lest we should be brought in the present Time to condemn ourselves to Uneasiness for those Faults which we cannot prevail with ourselves to forsake, and so adjourn the serious important Thing (that is only worth thinking of) to another Time, and so on to another, till our Days are at an End.

Into this wilful Incogitancy purely can be resolved all that amazing Non-improvement, Continuance and Growth in Sin, after so many frequent Exhortations, Warnings, Intreaties to the contrary; so many pious Books adapted to every one's Capacity. Who does not observe a prodigious Barrenness, notwithstanding so much Culture and Pains, so many Advantages, and the Engagements, and some Examples to be fruitful? Who does not lament many Thousands of Souls who resist all this, and will not prepare their Soil for any good Improvement?

Is there Leisure, is there Capacity wanting? or is there too much Difficulty in thinking aright of the operative Powers and of the future Life? No, none of these can be the Case:—For there is no Art of Thinking here required; no Conduct of the Understanding necessary; but the same common Understanding that manages a Shop, a Farm, or a Ship, or any other Affair of this World, is as capable, at the same Time, and without any interfering, to manage their eternal Salvation, and transact the one Thing necessary; if they would in this Case use it with the same Bent and Application as they ordinarily do in the other. But in Defect of this it comes to pass that we see so many studious and thoughtful in the one, and mighty sagacious in spying out Advantages, and catching at the Hits and Moments that belong to it; wisely provident
of

of Danger or Hazard, and preparing to escape and arm against it ; yet in the immortal Concernments careless or totally unconcerned, as if they could not fail to go right by chance, without any Concern or Conduct of theirs about the Matter, or so little however, as is next to none, in such low-spirited Attempts, as amount to no more than Wishes.

That we should think of attaining the eternal Felicity, the incorruptible Treasures of Glory, by Inadvertency, and by Arms folded up, whilst we are ordinarily sure we shall not thrive in these perishing Professions without Forecast, Labour, and Diligence ! To know all this, and to live as Men for the most Part do, is such a Mystery of Iniquity as can be accounted for by nothing but that heedless stupid Inconsideration which has seized the Minds of Sinners, the Sons of Disobedience and Folly. And with what Truth and Propriety is Wickedness in Scripture stiled Folly ? since they are Fools only that never think : *Non putaram*. Does not every one take the Reproach, *I never thought it*, as the greatest Reproach, except the Sinner ; who is certainly the foolishlest of Men and does not know it ?

You see then how unmanlike and unnatural is Vice ? when before we can habituate ourselves to it, we must act as if we had neither Hope nor Fear, or have them both inverted ; use our Understandings as if we used them not to discern or distinguish ; our Memories, as if it was their Properties to forget ; and our Affections, as if it was their Business to love and pursue what they ought to hate, and hate and avoid what they ought to love ; or remain indifferent and unaffected with that which most imports them.

This thoughtless Indifferency, this slothful Inconsideration, is the fatal Lethargy that possesses the
Wicked

Wicked in every Generation, and lulls them into seeming Ease and Security on the Edge of Ruin, like Men asleep on a Precipice, and so miserably defeats the Efforts of Religion, and its Ministers to awaken them out of their Danger. And it really is in all Ranks and Degrees the Cause and Source of every spiritual Evil among us. To what else can be imputed Mens not repenting at all, and not turning their Feet to God's Testimonies, but that they do not think on their Ways, which is the prescribed Method of returning to themselves and their Duty ; or, which is all one, deferring it till their Death-bed, or putting it off to To-morrow, when, from the Instances of so many sudden Deaths, they cannot promise themselves the next Hour? To what else others revolting from their good Resolution, but their considering amiss the Terms of Religion before they undertook them, or forgetting the Inducement that would make them continue firm to them? Why do some presume, despair, repine, distrust God, but that they do not consider his Justice, his Goodness, his Power? Why do some consider no more in the Day of Adversity than in Prosperity, tho' it was kindly sent them of God for that very Purpose, that they might make a Pause, and learn the holy Wisdom and Resentment, to love the World less, which favours them so little in the Day of Adversity?

Consider, says the Royal Preacher. Wherefore do others, so many others, make a Pastime of Life, and among their other Diversions mock at Sin, but that the Fool within them does not *consider*? Nor is God and Eternity *at all in his Thoughts*; nor will their incredulous Heedlessness think in earnest, till they meet the Conviction of Fools, which is Experience too late; when Remedy is past, and Thought will do no good; when that noble Privilege of your Nature, so sadly misused to the

worst

worst Abuse, or to the meanest Use, is turned upon them in Punishment, in weeping and wailing, and deploring without Hope and without Comfort forever; that Inconsiderateness of theirs, which conveyed them so stupidly secure into that awaking Perdition which receives the Lazy and the Wicked, the Fool and the Sinner. Why do Multitudes offend in their Tongues? because they forget to *take Heed to their Ways*, and set the Door of their Lips open without Watch, to let what will come out? Why are some *rash with their Mouth* when they address themselves to the Almighty, but that they do not (as the wise Man in *Ecclesiasticus* says) *consider that he is in Heaven and they on Earth*? Why do some behave with Irreverence at his publick Worship, and correct not their wandering Thoughts, but that they do not think in whose Presence they are? Why very many lose the very Effect of their Prayers to him, but because they do not consider and put in Practice those Qualifications that are requisite to render them worthy Askers? Why again does the lewd Person go to the Embraces of a Harlot; but that *he goes* (as *Solomon* describes him) *as an Ox to the Slaughter*, which has as little Consideration and Concern as if he was going to the Pasture? And another of the holy Penmen, represents the rash inconsiderate Sinner precipitating himself into Perdition, as *the brute Horse rushes into Battle*. How is it such numerous Instances of Mortality have so small Influence to put us upon considering our own latter End?

Do not these Deficiencies make an Order of Preachers absolutely necessary and beneficial, to advertise and stir Men up to their several Duties and Relations? If they would but learn to meditate on the divine Laws, and their own Doings in respect to them, and ponder much and thoroughly on the Matter, that Part of our Office, and much
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of that Pains we take might be spared ; and I would to God, you would be so wise in your own Practice as to render Preaching needless, which would be Matter of Joy and Comfort ; rather than by so much Negligence, and so little Sincerity, demand our utmost Earnestness and Pity, to compassionate so many perishing Souls.

Lastly, How is it (for it is endless to name all, as it is hard to set Bounds) that such Numbers pass thro' this beautiful World like careless Travellers, who make no Observation or Reflection on what they see ; where every Object was sufficient to fill them with Wonder and Admiration of the Wisdom of the Creator ? That so few know themselves, their proper Scope and End, their Powers and Inclinations ; and are commonly greatest Strangers at home, while they are foolishly curious to know and be acquainted with every Thing and Person beside ? That such Multitudes are born into the World, and so many go out of it in old Age too, yet never consider and follow their proper Business in it, or fill the Station that they were placed in ? What can produce all this, but that which is the fruitful Producer of all Sin and Folly, profound Inconsideration, and habitual Incogitancy ?

On the other Hand, since Consideration is, under God, the Author and Key to Knowledge ; since it is the Soil the Word of God requires to grow in, and the Disposition that the Holy Ghost will only visit, and bless with his divine Influences ; and is that Faculty which was given us from Heaven to discern between real Good and Evil, and conduct our Actions by those Views ; to argue and debate, to examine the Nature and End, Causes and Circumstances of every Thing that imports us, may look like something of an Excuse for an erroneous Judgment in the Sight of God when he reckons

reckons with us ; but Inconsiderateness can be none, in any that have the Use of their reasonable Faculties ; because all such had it in their Power, and might, as they were bound, have endeavoured to remove all Impediments in the Way. But since they *would listen to none of his Reproofs*, that very communing Faculty, which might have prevented, will justly become the Aggravation, and loudest Accent of their Woe ; because it will be to no Purpose, but to heighten the Anguish, and for ever multiply the miserable Regret of the timely Want of it to all Ages. Like a Lion that has been asleep, it will rouse up and tear them to Pieces, and devour them for ever and ever.

Let us then be what we are made to be, considerate Creatures to Purpose ; shew ourselves Men of Reason and Thought, considering our Ways before it is too late ; and I hope, by this Time, the Necessity and Advantage of Consideration abundantly appears as a Duty in general, which was the first Thing I was to make out.

II. In the next Place, I was to treat of it as a Duty particularly necessary to Hearers. And this will be no less clear, in as much as all that we have heard just now, or shall at any Time to come, will be no more than mere Words spilt among you, if you do not Favour us with your Attention now, and recollect afterwards what is said. What else was the Meaning of our Saviour's speaking so much in Parables, but by that Means to engage and attract the Multitude's Attention to his Doctrine ? What the Design of our Lord's so oft inculcating, *be that hath Ears to hear, let him hear* ? but to shew them the indispensable Duty of Hearing attentively, and the infinite Loss of not considering the Words of Life ? What the Intent of the Parable of the Sower ? but to illustrate very lively, that the Fault was not in the Seed (for that was to be

be sure sown with a Desire that all should grow, and with Endeavours that none should be lost) but the Ground that received it; every Piece of which ought to have been prepared and fitted by each single Hearer, by pious Consideration, and Removal of all worldly Weeds that might *choke the Word*, and hinder the Growth of a good Life and Conversation.

In our blessed Lord's Explication of this Parable, I cannot but take notice to you of some remarkable Things, which we may very well apply to those who promiscuously hear the Preachers of his blessed Gospel.—

* In Matt. xiii. 19. *he that beareth the Word and understandeth it not*; the Greek Word *oûnôias*, which we render, *Understand*, there signifies *ponder, consider of, lay to Heart, and observe in order to Practice*. This is the express Sense of the same Word in several Places of holy Writ: For in the Reason of Things there can be no understanding any Thing without considering it.---

Again, some of the Seed fell where the Ground did not cover it! It is to be feared much of the heavenly Seed falls on such Ground as this, where it lies as it fell, unrooted in Men's Minds, uncovered with the Thoughts, and unburied in the Resemblance; which is the Reason you see so little Fruit and Increase among the Generality, scarce the Sign of Seed being sown among some.

Again, the Devil taketh away the Seed that was sown upon the Highway! How can he accomplish this? but either by diverting their Attention with Drowfulness, or prompting them with Thoughts quite foreign to their Business, preventing their recollecting and applying afterwards, if any Thing perchance has touched their Case home, by Com-

* Vide *Whitby*.

pany, unnecessary Visits, trifling Discourse, by any Thing that comes in the Way to put off the present Application ; and it is put off so often, till at last it is quite forgot ; and there remaineth no more Trace, or Impression, of what was heard, than a useless Reflection, and sometimes an injudicious Observation of the Preacher's Composure, Stile, or Delivery. Thus they lose the Substance by catching at the Shadow, and forget the Matter in Commendation of the Manner. As if you should receive a Letter from some mighty Monarch, with the kindest Invitations to vast Honours and Advantages, on the easiest Conditions, and should never mind the Contents of it, but only view and admire the Fairness of the Hand-writing.

Only let me ask ye, should an earthly Prince, in reality, send such a Message to you, with such advantageous Proposals, and request you to take them into your serious Consideration, could you in Civility refuse them so far ? And does not the King of Kings, and Lord of Lords, and does not the supreme Majesty of Heaven and Earth send his Ministers continually, even this very Day, with Proposals of infinite Advantage, on Terms as easy as can be made, which are perfect Freedom and Pleasure ; does he not command, beseech, and entreat you, to *consider your Ways*, to take the Reasons of them into mature Consideration ? This is all he begs of, this is all he commands, you, who might command you any Thing in your Power, that you would but make a Pause, and weigh together the unspeakable Bliss and Happiness on the one Hand, with the Easiness of attaining them, the dire Consequences of Disobedience on the other, together with the Uncertainty and Unsatisfactoriness of the Possessions, Honours, and Pleasure it aims at. Consider but of these Things, and it is as impossible you should reject the one and embrace the other, as

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that you would run with your Eyes open into a deep Gulph.

What Self-destruction then are those guilty of, who cast those Messages behind them, without ever so much as one serious Consideration, though they come from the greatest of all Potentates in the most pressing Manner? Of all those who are unheedful of what is said, and carry nothing out of the Church but the Letters of the Text in its Chapter and Verse, that of our Saviour is too sadly verified, *that bearing they bear not*: But, which is worst of all, that Consequence which by Degrees grows from this, is Hardness of Heart; the Means of Recovery weakens in its Operation, and they become less capable of considering, like Men that tie up their Joints so long till they lose the Use of them. Every Time you hear Faults reprov'd, and do not mend them, they double in Guilt, and their Condemnation increases, *Prov. xxix. 1. He that being oft reprov'd, hardeneth his Neck, shall suddenly fall.* If the Word preached is not *the Saviour of Life unto Life*, it will be the *Savour of Death unto Death*. We should be sorry to be the Occasion of aggravating the Punishment of any unfruitful Hearer; but the Fault will be in themselves: We intend nothing but their Reformation and Salvation. It is in your Power then to give us much Comfort, and to avoid the Curse which *Jeremiab* pronounces, *Cursed is he that does the Work of the Lord negligently*, by complying with the Advice (in *Deut. xvii. 12.*) *Hearken diligently to the Priest that standeth to minister before the Lord your God, and to the Levites that teach the Good Knowledge of the Lord*: And, as it follows a little after, *all the People shall hear and fear, and do no more presumptuously*. Let this ever be your Caution, *To-day, if you will hear his Voice, harden not your Hearts,*

The Advantage of considering our Ways. 387

Hearts, and be not like the deaf Adder, that stoppeth his Ears, charm we never so wisely.

If preaching the Word is feeding the Flock, you must find Stomachs to digest the Food; and no Stomach can digest the sincere *Milk of the Word*, and convert it to Nourishment, but Consideration, which you may all receive it in, if you please. Are we Physicians, who are bound faithfully to dispense Medicines to your spiritual Ailments, and rightly and affectionately tell you how they should be applied? If you will not apply in proper Time and Place, they will do no more good than a Remedy put into a Man's Pocket will cure him of an internal Distemper. Consideration then is the universal Digester and Applier both of the Food and Medicine, and it lies upon you, as your Duty and Part to perform; which if ye do as ye ought, the plainest Discourse will at any Time afford Matter and Subject for your Meditation.

The *third* Thing in Order I was to do, is to enforce this so important Duty of Consideration from the Enforcement of the Prophet, *Thus saith the Lord*: A very solemn Preface this, never premised but to something of the greatest Moment; but I am constrained to urge it in a few Words; *Consider your Ways*; I am the Lord, who command it, the Lord of Hosts, mighty and terrible to revenge myself on the Disobedient: It is I who enjoin it; consider who I am, and refuse me this Compliance if you dare! I request it of you with all imaginable Intreaties for your Good, that you think of your Danger in Time, and prevent it. I put you in mind of it, who am conscious to, and keep a Record of, the sinful Privacies of your Thoughts, Words, and Works: Do ye think you escape my Knowledge, when retired from human Eyes? Do ye forget who looks on you, and takes an Account? 'Tis I, ye Sons of Men, that expect this Return from you,

this Exercise of the Reason I have given you ; I, your Creator and Redeemer, your daily Nourisher and Preserver. *The Ox knows his Owner, the Ass his Master's Crib* ; will ye fall short of the Sense of either, as ye will do, if ye do not acknowledge me your Benefactor ? Will ye imitate the Stupidity of my People *Israel* of old, whom Miracles or Benefits could not oblige ? But behold they are rejected ! Beware lest you also be cut off for your Ingratitude. Consider this ye that forget God ; remember this, and shew yourselves Men ; bring it again to Mind, O ye Transgressors ; think of it again, and again ; allow some Time to commune with your Heart, and in your Chamber, and be still ! God may well expect this from us, and the happy Effect to ourselves will undoubtedly follow.——Consider therefore what the Lord says to you ; *Thus saith the Lord of Hosts, Consider your Ways* ; and the Lord give you Understanding in all Things. Amen.

Grant, we beseech thee, Almighty God, that the Words we have heard this Day with our outward Ears, may be so inwardly ingrafted in our Hearts, that they may bring forth in us the Fruit of good Living, to the Honour and Praise of thy Name, and the Salvation of all our Souls, thro' Jesus Christ, our Lord.



CONFIRMATION

S E R M O N

The Twenty-First.

Of Keeping the Heart.

PROV. vi. 23.

*Keep thy Heart with all Diligence, for out of it are
the Issues of Life.*

FOR our farther Eviction, and readier Compliance with the Design of these Words, I would be permitted to discourse in the following Method :

- I. I shall enquire into the Reasonableness of this and other Admonitions of Scripture, for the due Regulation of our Thoughts in the Sight of God, in Hopes that we shall yield a more ready Obedience to them.
- II. Wherein consisteth the Sin and Guiltiness of our Thoughts; which it should employ the main of our Care to be innocent of.
- III. I will conclude with laying down such Rules and Directions as may be of use to further the Practice of this great Duty.

First, I am to shew the Reasonableness of this Duty. And this, I hope, will appear under these two following Heads of Reflection. *First*, upon the Nature of God's Laws. *2dly*, The Nature and Constitution of us Men, who are subject to them.

With respect to the first, we cannot but know, upon the least Reflection, that it is the peculiar Prerogative of the Laws of the King of Heaven, the only *Heart-knowing* God, when they prohibit or command any outward Action, to extend their Influence and Authority to the first Spring, where it has its Rise. Therefore it is a most authentick Rule in interpreting the Extent of those Laws, whensoever they expressly enjoin or forbid an exterior Action, that the Motives, Indications, and Tendency of the Mind towards that Action, are all bound to their Duty, and all comprehended under its Obedience : Because, as it will appear presently, the Guilt lies chiefly there, and there the Virtue : Thus God has wisely laid down one Law of an inward Obligation, to secure the other nine, the last and 10th Command, which lays Restraint upon the Thoughts and Desires, as a Fence to all the rest : If this is not observed, none of the rest will be kept ; but a due Observance of this preserves Obedience to the others. Without such a Law forbidding to covet, *Sin* (as St. Paul argues, *Rom. vii. 10.*) is dead ; or, as he elsewhere explains it, without such a Law setting Bounds to our Thoughts, there would be no *Transgression* ; no Transgression certainly, because no certain Knowledge of God's Displeasure against it. But the Commandment, or revealed Will of God interposed, that *Sin* might appear *exceeding sinful* to us ; that we knowing the Source of Evil so plainly, might be the more circumspect of its first Admission. It avails little before him, that we abstain from the outward Act of Sin, if we are vitious within, and have a willing Mind

Mind to commit it. Though innocent of the Fact, we may nevertheless be prepenſe Criminals, and guilty of tranſgreſſing every Command: So the Teacher of all Righteouſneſs answers, *That Murthers, Adulteries, Fornications, Thefts, False Witneſs, Blaſphemies, Covetouſneſs, Wickedneſs, and Deceit, proceed from the Heart, and defile the Man,* in *Matth. xv. 19.* and *Mark vii. 22.*

He, who in latter Days came to put God's Laws further into Men's Hearts, and write them in their inward Parts, purſues two Inſtances more particularly, to give an Apprehenſion of the true Intent and Interpretation of the moral Law of *Mofes*, ſince the Scribes and Pharifees had, by their carnal ſelfiſh Comments, cramped the Meaning, and reſtrained the Practice to the very Letter, placing Righteouſneſs in a ſuperficial Conformity to that which was in Truth but the Shell and Outſide, and had nothing of the Conſcience of the preſcribed Duty in it. Our Lord ſetting himſelf to reſtore the Law to its true ſpiritual Intendment, by Way of Introduction to his Deſign, rebukes thoſe Perverters of Deſiciency, and tells the World, *Except our Righteouſneſs exceeds theirs, we cannot have Entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven:* Then proceeds to Particulars, that luſtful and adulterous Thoughts, conceived and entertained in the Mind, by *looking upon a married Woman, bring forth a Sin* againſt the ſeventh Commandment, and do as verily violate the Intent of it in the Sight of God, as he that is taken in the impure Embrace. In like manner, he that bears Hatred in his Heart, owes a Spite, and nourishes revengeful Purpoſes, ſuppoſe againſt his Brother's Life, is as criminal as he that actually commits the Murther: For, he that does that, does no more than ſacrifice the Life of his Brother to that implacable Hatred he has conceived againſt

him: There is, indeed, no Difference between the two, but that the first, not incurring the legal Penalty upon Earth, is the more cautious Offender ; but, in a true Account of Things, as really guilty, and consequently as obnoxious to the divine Vengeance, as the other. Forasmuch as he abstained from the approved Fact, not out of a Sense of his Duty, not for the Sake of God or his Neighbour, but purely for Fear of Suffering for it from the Laws of Society ; All the Time the Lord *pondereth the Heart, and weigheth the Spirit* of all our Designs and Actions, to see whether Things are right there or not, and God seeth not as Men see ; We can judge by Appearance only, he by the Bent and Behaviour of the Heart.

It is the Homage and Obedience therefore of the inward invisible Man, that can ever recommend a Person in the Sight of the invisible God, as his Servant and Subject. Tho' the outward visible Action is due to the Command of God or Man, requiring it ; yet it is only acceptable as it is the Performance and Expression of that inward Principle which renders it an Act of Religion. We are in Candour bound to think all is regular and really virtuous, where we see the outward Actions of our Neighbour, (which is all we can see) to be such. As if we should see him give all his worldly Goods to feed the Poor ; we ought to presume, in our Judgment of that Matter, that such a one has Charity : Yet God judging of the Reality of that Virtue by the Heart, has assured us of the contrary, that there may be no Charity in it. For there is the outward Act and external Part in Almsgiving, and every moral Obedience ; of receiving the Lord's Supper, and every evangelical Duty : Which may be done *to be seen of Men* : And as often as it is found of God to be destitute of the Con-
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rence of the inward Man regarding him that requires it, *it profiteth nothing* ; it has no Principle, no Reality, no Righteousness in it : Because our heavenly Master and Lawgiver, whom we serve, is present with, and privy to, and takes account of, all the good or guilty Negotiations of the Mind ; its secret Thoughts, Purposes, Wishes, and Designs.

We fulfil, indeed, the primary Intent of human Laws, by paying an outward Submission to them. For as much as these Tribunals can take no Cognizance of mere Thoughts and Intentions, and for that Reason, can judge and punish nothing but Overt-Acts, and external Violations of them ; without which, added to Intention in Evidence of the same, there would be no Criminal : The Mind in the mean Time contracts, as to the Design of human Laws, inward Defilement by breaking them ; because they can take no Cognizance what Men are in their Qualifications for another World, but what Manner of Persons or Citizens they are in Society ; which can receive no Damage, or the least Prejudice from any Man's Thoughts, be they never so villanous, provided they never have any Egress in Word or Deed. But Man cannot so transgress the Precepts of the living God and be innocent ; because his Obligation to them begins from within. Where the Act itself first takes its Rise, there the Intention is, and that differences the Action. It is impossible, therefore, for any of us to be observant of the primary Directions of them, without an inward Compliance, submitting our Souls and Spirit to the Yoke, approving with the Understanding, and heartily embracing and obeying with the Will. In this lies the Homage of rational Man ; in this the conscious Sincerity of every Christian. The inward Man being the *Man after God's own Heart*, it is in *that* Man, and in *that* Man only, we can walk before him in a
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perfect Heart and Conscience undefiled, keeping our whole Spirit and Soul, as well as Body, blameless unto the Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. When with full Intention of pleasing God, and none else; with an entire Respect to his Authority over us, and to nothing besides; then it is we love God, keep his Commandments with all our Heart, with all our Soul, with all our Strength.

Outward Observance may be, and very much of it is, done and directed to be seen of Men, and yet void of the Love or Fear of God at the Bottom, which is the true vivifying and animating Spring of Religion: It is therefore the Obedience of the Heart replete with these which is the Test by which we must stand or fall. The Heart has none in its Privacy to please, none to fear, none to approve itself to, but him alone, who is *Spirit*, and a *Discerner of Spirits*; who perfectly sees it, and therefore is unexceptionably qualified to try and examine it. This he does by estimating our virtuous Actions from the religious Intention they proceed from; making no Difference, in some Cases, between a fixt Resolution of doing Good, and the Act itself done: Declaring his Acceptance of a willing Mind for the Deed, in the Case of Charity, when it happens to be out of our Power, and we have no Opportunity to perform; so likewise does he measure our Disobedience, by the Purpose and Disposition of Mind, rather than the Fact itself, which renders it only more evil in the Kind, as administering Occasion of Scandal, or bad Example. This is again confirmed in the *Proverbs*, Chap. xxiv. Verse 9. *He that deviseth to do Evil, shall be called a mischievous Person; and that the Thoughts of Foolishness is Sin, as well as the Fact.*

For,

For, consider we, 2dly, The Frame and Constitution of ourselves, and all Sin and Transgression, Duty and Obedience, will be found to be properly and solely in our Mind, which is our thinking Faculty, which is the true Agent of all human Actions; the Mind, the only moral Part of Man that has Freedom to chuse or refuse the Evil or the Good, and so become capable of Virtue or Vice: The Body is no other than a Handmaid and Servant, receiving Orders and Directions in all its Operations, whilst the Soul acts the Hand and all the Members, and takes its Aim through them, and is the Author, and is the Actor of their Righteousness, and their Deviations.— Hence proceed the *Issues of Life and Death* eternal, in the issuing Effects and Fruits in our Words and Actions, Lives and Conversations: Out of this *Treasure* (according as it is) *a Man brings forth good or evil Things*: Here again grows the Tree, in another of our blessed Lord's Comparisons, which *brings forth its Fruit* good or bad, according to its Kind; this Root of all moral Action, of all that is acceptable, of every Thing that is displeasing to our God. The Thoughts of the Righteous are Right, and the Thoughts of the Wicked an Abomination. If the Manners are profligate, it proceeds from the Heart first being so in the inward Parts of such as are wicked. The *Psalmist* thus accounts for it; *If the Fountain is polluted, so will be the Streams*; whatever flows from thence, must partake of its Uncleaness of Course.

Here then should begin our Endeavours of purifying ourselves; this is the shortest Way to be Holy and Religious. Those Laws of God are, therefore, most necessary, just, and good, which enjoin us to look inward into ourselves, examine our Inclinations and Intentions that pass there; to visit and survey the inward Man, and employ our
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main Care in mending our inward Frame, and disposing it. The Light of Nature, the Law of *Moses*, and of Christ, all conspire to invigorate this Caution in us.

How clearly do some wise Heathens discourse to this same Effect. * That the Willing and Thinking of Sin is the Commitment of it; that we do in Effect whatever we will and resolve in ourselves to do; that a Man may be a Thief only in Intent, and so be guilty of whatever other Mischief he intends to another, tho' he never attempt it, or miscarry in the Attempt; that the Mind may be adulterous, tho' every Member of the Body is innocent. And another presses us to guard and inspect within ourselves, for there is the Fountain of Good.

After these, and so many awakening Warnings and Precautions, made known to us, moreover, from the Old and New Testament, how much is to be reprov'd in the Numbers of those called Christians, who are perfectly careless and unconcerned as to this main Article of their Conduct? They, it may be, make a fair Shew in the Flesh, keep *clean the Outside*, whilst the Soul within is lothsome, and the Inside of the Vessel, that is to offer a pure Sacrifice to God, *full of Uncleannefs*, and all Unfitness. But our Lord distinguishes first and foremost, *had they cleaned the Inside*, behold, the *Inside would be clean also* before God and Man: Yet how many are void of Reflection, or Inspection over their Mind, whose thoughtless Conduct is governed by a Be-

* Namque scelus in se tacitum quo cogitat ullum
Facti crimen habet.

Facimus id quodcunque volumus.

Latro est etiam antequam manus inquinat.

Incesta est etiam sine stupro, qui stuprum querit.

Adultra mens.

ἔνδον βλεπε ἔνδον ἢ πλὴν τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ.

JUV.

SEN.

Id.

M.

OVID.

ANTONIN.

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lief as if at all Times and in all Places Thoughts were absolutely free, *i. e.* They may think of what they please; and provided they abstain from external Acts of Sin, falsely imagine they may with Innocence gratify their Thoughts with Wishes, and laying Designs how they may obtain what Possessions and unlawful Enjoyments they like best; and forming Schemes in Imagination, what they would do if all Obstacles were removed, and the facilitating Means and Opportunity present. But let us think more soberly, as being well apprized of this known Truth; that though our Thoughts are free from the Controul of Men, and must remain so, they are bound in Subjection to God, seeing their Wickedness may in some Sense be much more enormous than Actions themselves. For, is it not easy and ready at Hand for every Body to imagine themselves enjoying or possessing, more than ever they can all their Life-time obtain, or doing more Villiany and Violence than is possible to perpetrate? There being neither Opportunity nor Means wanting to the Thoughts, to hinder their committing what they please at any Distance of Place, in an instant of Time: Nay, they may re-act over again what cannot be done twice; and can with that Vigour and Inclination, and full Propensity of Will, commit again those Sins which the Body is disabled from joining with the Mind in: So boundless, so very irregular, may the *Imaginations of the Heart* be! How highly, therefore, does it import us to be more careful in this Matter, to repent of those Sins we have hitherto made no Scruple to commit in this undetected Way, and to guard against them for the future? Which brings me to the

Second Business from these Words: To state wherein consisteth the moral Irregularity, Sin and Guiltiness of our Thoughts, which should employ the

the main of our Care to be innocent of. In order to this, I shall lay down these few Observations, 1. That all Sin of this Kind, which shall be imputed to us as ours, consists in and proceeds from a full Consent of the Will to Objects evil in themselves; or to indifferent ones in wrong Time or Season. 2. That all Men in good State of Health, have Freedom of Thought to turn and fix them upon what Object they please, and Power of resisting evil Motions whencesoever they proceed from; depraved Nature in general, or our particular Constitution, or the Suggestions of evil Spirits. 3. As far as we voluntarily give Occasion to the Rise of evil Thoughts, so far are we answerable for them. These Positions kept in Mind, will help us to understand clearly, wherein the Immorality of our Thoughts consists, and to solve all particular Cases relating thereto.

Hence then, it appears in the first Place, that the speculative Thinking of Sin, is no Sin; for thus the best of us may muse and reflect upon the vile Nature of Iniquity, and become the better for it the more we think of it, if it is in order to raise in ourselves, or others, a holy Hated of it, a firmer Indignation against ever committing it for the Future; and thus we ought to think and reason of every particular Sin, we may be tempted to, and take in all the strengthening Consideration, to raise our Aversion the higher, and keep us at a greater Distance; mean Time the Mind contracts no Pollution. The sole Crime proceeds from the criminal End of Thinking upon Evil; if that is at any Time evil, then our Thoughts become certainly such, *i. e.* if we think of it with Approbation, and give it a welcome Reception, if a Friendship is beginning, and Love and Liking is kindling towards it, and Schemes and Intrigues are laying to accomplish it; that is to say, in two Words, if it has the

the Assent and Consent of the Will ; then will it be sinful unto us ; and all those kind of indulged Thoughts are so many Constituents of our Guilt, because they are so many repeated Efforts towards the Action ; and every deliberate sinful Action, that we shall answer for, we very well know becomes deliberate by that previous Train of Thoughts. Consequently to dwell upon and delight in evil Thoughts, with full Consent and subsequent Contrivance for Execution, is the first Degree of Sin ; the next is reducing the Scheme to Action ; Repetition of which begets a Habit, which commonly produces either a Justification of the Sin, or a dilatory Repentance ; and that seldom fails of concluding in Hardness of Heart, and utter Impenitence.

Again, tho' the Object is innocent, and indifferent in itself, yet if we think of it in wrong Time and Place, our Thoughts become irregular, and blame-worthy. To instance the present Time and holy Place we are in: 'Tis unquestionably allowable, and even commanded to think of the Affairs of our respective Employments ; but if those Thoughts spring in our Minds at the Season of our Devotion ; (and any Thing that is foreign or improper is but too apt to come into the Mind at such Times) if we deliberately let our Minds ramble and go astray after them, and do not immediately endeavour to stifle and suppress them, and recover our Thoughts to what we are about, this is Sin ; because the Nature of the Duty we are engaged in will admit of no such Mixture, and by the second Proposition we had a Power of resisting evil Motions.

But now, if we proceed to distinguish these evil Motions, there is the certain Comfort to all Christians in general, that the first Beginnings and Hankerings of the Mind after Evil, which are continually issuing from the Fountain of original Corruption

ruption within us, and therefore incident to the best and holiest Persons, when they neither know of, nor consent to their Intrusion; that these are not to be counted of as any Sin in us at all, because nothing is a Sin which is involuntary, and cannot be helped; they are the pardonable Infirmary of human Nature, not any particular Person's Fault; they are permitted Occasions to exercise Vigilance, and the Virtues of our Mind; for if we consent not to, but cast out those evil Suggestions with all Haste and Hatred, it is a noble Opportunity of discharging our Duty; there is not any Displeasure to be feared from God, provided we manfully do our Part in stopping their Progress.

In my second Proposition, I affirmed Persons in sound Disposition of Body have Freedom of Thought to turn them to what they please; by which I designed to except the no uncommon Case of Persons disordered with Melancholy, proceeding from Obstructions in the animal Faculties, and Disorders of the Spirits, who for so long are haunted with a Sett of odd, dismal, despairing Thoughts, which they cannot govern nor expel out of their Minds; they are rather passive than active in these Misfortunes, and they and their Friends may be assured that God will no more punish them in another World for this, than for a Man's having a Fever or a Lunacy, which he cannot get rid of.

It is Time now to descend to some Particulars, and apply these Propositions.

For Instance, It is not the first rising in our Mind of a lascivious Thought, upon looking on an Object, that makes the mental Transgression, or the incontinent Look. This is sometimes not in our Power to prevent, in the present Circumstances of our Constitution; but then only, when instead of rejecting and striving against, we voluntarily and greedily close with it, begin to caress, and
proceed

proceed to enjoy the Cloud of our own Fancy, it will be laid to our Charge as a Sin against God, and without cleansing Repentance deserve his Wrath.

Of this Sort of Thoughts, administering to the Gratification of the brutal Part, there are observable Degrees of Iniquity : If they rise from the Prevalency of a present Temptation they are more excusable : If from the Remembrance of an Object when absent, worse ; but if from the Recollection of former Debaucheries, and the Offender is incapable, thro' Sickness or Age, of acting, and yet delights to ruminate on the Pleasures of his old Sins, this is spiritual Iniquity for Iniquity's Sake, and being without Temptation, is worse than a fresh Commission with one. These are therefore placed by *St. Paul, Rom. i.* in the Rank of the most consummate and irreformable of Sinners ; for it is the same vitiated Temptation of Mind, not only to commit Sin, but to *take Pleasure in those* that do. These are each guilty by the first Proposition, because they indulged the full Consent of the Will ; and they are more so by the second, as having a Power of resisting, and expelling those Inclinations out of their Mind, and filling their Room with better Thoughts. The same Application holds in Case of Provocation ; 'tis not the first Resentment of Anger, which all Tempers are differently susceptible of, some more than others, but when we suffer it to broil upon the Mind, to digest into Rancour and Revenge, then it is become obnoxious ; and so of all Sorts of irregular Thoughts whatever, if we indulge them, if we do not use a conscientious Endeavour to check and thrust them out when perceived, or at least to divert or change them, they become Matter of our Sin, and of our Repentance.

Lastly, If we apply the 3d Rule to each of these Instances: As far as we give Occasion voluntarily and deliberately to the first starting of evil Thoughts in us; as chusing ill Company, preferring to converse with Objects, which we experimentally know will strike an ill Impression on us, and be apt to captivate and enslave the Will; we become doubly guilty, both of the first Rise and of the Consequence of these Thoughts: For we are very justly accounted before God and Man the Authors of what overflows from a Cause of our own making.

I have now only to ask leave to lay before you two or three Directions, which may facilitate the Performance of this Duty.

I. Then, if we would guard our Hearts, and preserve our Thoughts regular and blameless, let us give heed to keep ourselves (as much as the Circumstances of our Way of Living will admit) from all Occasions that may excite and give Birth to evil ones. It is good to keep as far as possible out of Harm's-way, and never thrust ourselves into Danger.

It was in vain for the *Romish* Priest to take *Cassius* in his pious Hand to read over for the Purity of the *Latin*, and in the mean Time pray to God, every Time he read, to preserve his Thoughts chaste; because God never assists those who court their own Danger. Our Care then is to enter into Bond and Covenant with our Eyes and Ears, and other Faculties, that they will not designedly approach that which is Evil: Especially never needlessly put ourselves in the Way, much less purposely rush upon those Occasions of Falling, which every one's Experience is Judge and Monitor of; but fly from every Thing that is likely to rouse up our Bosom-Sin, the Sin of our Complexion, which is ever disposed to take the least Hint. We should use all Ways to weaken, but not one to strengthen it: We should be fortified with

with the Prescriptions of Religion, and carefully watch every Avenue of the Soul ; but place a double Guard in that Part which is weakest : For Sin is much easier prevented in its first Beginning, than its after Progress.

II. Another good Expedient to keep our Thoughts from being misemployed, is to propose and bring in the best Materials to work upon ; for the Soul is of such a volatile, active Nature, that it must be thinking on something or other.—If we do not take care to busy it about what is good or innocent, its natural Tendency leads it to what is worse.—But be sure we avoid Idleness, which is the Parent not only of vain, foolish, trifling Thoughts, the Regulation of which denominates a wise Man, but usually of criminal vicious ones. The Son of *Sirach* says the same Thing, and so does Experience, That *Idleness teacheth much Evil* ; it enervates the Powers of the Mind ; it takes it off the Guard against Temptation, and the good Seed of Religion is *choked* in its Bryers and Weeds ; and the Devil can never wish for a better Opportunity to effect his Purposes upon us ; and our Saviour tells us, he never omits to improve them, to his own Advantage and our Ruin. We should then be never at Leisure for Sin, and him ; but always better, and too busily employed. The Wisdom of Providence accordingly has put the greatest Part of Mankind under a Necessity of labouring for their Bread, that their Minds might have the Advantage of being occupied upon what at least is innocent ; and we should ever bound our Thoughts to the present Occasion, suffer nothing else to share in them, and then, whether in religious or temporal Affairs, we shall be whole Men in every Thing, and do twice the Business in the same Time.

Repas we, therefore, what Thoughts are upon our Minds ; if of the evil Kind, expel them, change them
for

for some other Subject ; and are there not infinite others besides to think on ? If there be any Thing *honest, pure, lovely, of good Report, if any Virtue, if any Praise, think* we, as the Apostle bids us, *on these Things*. If there be any Thing innocent in the Boundaries of the Universe, think upon that, rather than Sin.

III. To preserve our Thoughts in continual Order, and upon their Duty, we should consider that they are all under the Eye of God, and that he weighs and scans them, and takes Account of all Passages that are amiss.

And as Prayer is a powerful Remedy, and my last Advice, I conclude with that excellent Collect of our Church.

*Almighty God, unto whom all Hearts be open, all De-
no Secrets are hid, cleanse the Thoughts of our
sires known, and from whom Hearts by the Inspi-
ration of thy Holy Spirit ; that we may perfectly
love thee, and worthily magnify thy Name, thro'
Christ our Lord : To whom, with the Father, and
the Holy Spirit, be ascribed all Obedience in Thought,
Word, and Deed; all Honour, Majesty, and Do-
minion, henceforth, and for ever.*

The End of the FIRST VOLUME.

